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# *Savonarola*

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*Savonarola*

# *Savonarola*

## A STUDY IN CONSCIENCE

*By Ralph Roeder*

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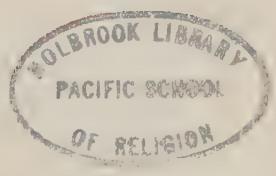

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# *Part One*

# I

# *Youth*

## I

ON April 26, 1475, a young man entered the Monastery of San Domenico in Bologna. His motive was clear in his own mind and he explained it carefully in his farewell letter to his father. ' The great misery of the world, the iniquity of men ' — these, he said, were ' the greatest passion he could have in this world,' and they had determined him to embrace religion. The age, he declared, had fallen so low that he could not find one man who did good, no, not one; and for his part he was resolved to ' live as a creature of reason and not as a beast among swine.' For further enlightenment, he referred him to a tract he had composed on *The Contempt of the World*. On this tract the old man noted his bereavement and the date; and he added a laconic and eloquent comment — " and he left me, Niccolo Savonarola, his father, the enclosed exhortations and consolations for my comfort."

## *Savonarola*

Niccolo Savonarola was a pious man but he found his son's virtue trying. For twenty-two years all his hopes had rested on that boy, and now — ! He was not only hurt, he was bewildered. The world had been kind to his son, and his abhorrence of it baffled him. He knew of no personal motive for it, and he was too old to believe in impersonal ones. Too old, yes, he was too old to understand such high moral earnestness in a lad of twenty-two, or to accept his passionate indignation on purely disinterested grounds. The boy was young — just young enough to mistake his own motives. But it was idle to speculate. He had been born with a bilious and melancholy temperament, and misanthropy was no doubt his birthright. The old man realized, as he looked back over the years, that the symptoms had been many, but he had been blind to them, and now it was too late. He resigned himself to the loss, and his one comment on it was to record side by side, in an old book, the dates of his son's birth and death to the world. On September 21, 1452, his wife gave birth to a boy who was named Girolamo, Maria, Francesco, and Matteo, and sponsored by the Chancellor of the Duke of Ferrara; on April 24, 1475, he left his home to become a monk. The melancholy contrast of those facts was an insoluble mystery; and closing the book, he bequeathed his perplexity to posterity.

## II

To the son, however, it was clear. Ever since he could remember, he had been haunted by a vague memory of a ' far-distant country,' which he had forfeited in the sordid and obtuse ordeal of birth. With instinctive consistency, he continued to seek it to the end of his days. Never could he reconcile himself to this alien and intolerably finite sensation of being; but he found relief at last in the faith that his soul — his *anima transmigratoria,* as he called it — was only migrating from one eternity to another, and turned for release to the living death of the cloister. " Two things above all I loved," he said later, " freedom and peace; and they brought me to port."

In retrospect the pattern lay clear, but it had taken him twenty-two years to see it, and by then human bondage was strong upon him. Filial affection, filial responsibility — he found their ties difficult to break. In him all the hopes of his family had been invested; at an early age, he had been chosen to carry on its traditions and illustrate its name — a name which his grandfather had made famous. The reputation of Michele Savonarola as a physician and a scholar had won him a chair in the University of Ferrara and an appointment as personal physician to Niccolo d'Este; and it was his example which the boy was brought up to emulate. His

learning was varied; it ranged from religion and politics to agriculture, dentistry, metaphysics, and the mineral baths of Italy; and his labors on these subjects reflected on his patron the lustre for which he had been employed. After Niccolo's death, he continued to enjoy the favor of his sons, Lionello and Borso, and was entrusted with the education of the heir to the Duchy. When he retired, he was granted a pension, a title of nobility, and a testimonial in which his patron congratulated himself on an association which he compared to the most illustrious of classical antiquity — Alexander and Aristotle, Hiero and Archimedes, Augustus and Artorius. Life had been kind to Michele Savonarola; and in the evening of his days his one care was to preserve this sinecure in the family and to train his successor.

His son, Niccolo, suffered a natural handicap: he was eclipsed by his father's fame. Of his grandsons, the eldest hankered for a soldier's life, and the second showed no ambition at all; but in the third he detected an intelligence on which he fastened with the determination of a man who sees his lifework compromised by the mediocrity of his offspring. He took him in hand, and until he was sixteen, the boy was educated at home, by his grandfather. In young Girolamo his hopes seemed to be rewarded; he responded promptly to responsibility; the education he received coincided exactly with his tastes; and he matured rapidly. His predilection for

philosophy, in particular, was remarkable. He mastered the intricacies of scholastic dialectics with the ease of a mind to which such problems were innately congenial, and it was almost possible to believe, from his assiduity in those studies, that first principles were already a matter of vital moment to him. His grandfather was gratified; he foresaw the development of an even more metaphysical physician than himself; but he was not satisfied. Encouraged by his success, he was tempted to improve upon it. Himself a very pious man, he poured his piety into the young mind; and here the response was even more profound. Piety seemed to satisfy an inward need; it sank deep in his impressionable nature, saturating it with other-worldly ardors, and deepening his mistrust of the world with scruples which the first shock would convert into a chronic obstruction. Long before he had learned to live, he had been taught to weigh and distrust life; and no untutored impulses tempted him to investigate it. Timid, studious, and self-sufficient, he grew up among books and matured with his elders. In the years when children rehearse reality in play, his toys were altars; later, his favorite book was the Bible; and at sixteen the model lad, whose propriety alarmed no one, was already scandalized by the frivolity of his generation and echoed his grandfather's laments at its unholiness.

Grave and retiring, he shunned the pleasures and the companionship of his years. With the boys on the street

he had no commerce. The vital discipline of promiscuous boyhood, the morality of Nature, the male code of the street — the only canons of conduct by which men are finally guided — touched him only to offend him. Yet his nature was warm, he had a capacity for friendship; and in later years he praised and lamented it eloquently. "What joy in virtue without friendship? " he said then. But that was the wisdom of manhood; in childhood he reversed it, and as he found very little virtue in boys of his age, he avoided their society. Of such reversals is the painful wisdom of experience made. His grandfather had no patience with frivolous pastimes, with youths who 'ran to hear sing of romance sooner than to chant Vespers in church,' and he had an apt pupil. It was in church that he was most often to be found, in the solitude of some dim nave, where the raw rumors of the street reached him only as a vague echo, faint as the drone of flies about the fonts, where a tepid water lay stagnating. He loved the country and spent hours of communion with Nature and himself in long solitary rambles along the slow-flowing Po. The wide, flat, treeless landscape pleased him; his being expanded, in kindred immensity, in its infinite spaces. The vast, low, alluvial plain, under a moist sun; the murmuring river, roaming and grazing, a moving monotone of somnolent contentment, toward the sea; the towering clouds — everything filled his spirit with vague intimations of its 'far-distant country'; though sometimes he would forget; some-

times, lying under the hot laden vines, he would nod; sometimes, what with the heat and the glare and the insinuating scent of the grape, he would succumb to his senses and stretch out his lazy length, for an oblivious hour, in peace with the satisfied earth.

After his grandfather's death, he was educated for two years by his father; then he was sent to the University. He was eighteen; it was his first contact with the world, and his impression was one of rebellion, confusion, and dismay. He was shocked by the methods of public instruction; the wrangling of rival professors reminded him, he said, of the tilt-yard. But, with his physical timidity, he was mentally alert, and the hollow formulas, the facile verbiage, the empirical reasoning, and the systematic contention of his mentors filled him with confusion and disgust. The great principles of life for which he was groping, the ripe wisdom of maturity — were they all to be reduced to a display of rhetorical virtuosity and a test of lung-power? Where could such methods lead — where but to the destruction of all ideal order, the discredit of authority, and the demoralization of youth? At once curious and conservative, civil and rebellious, he was torn between protest and distaste. But what irked him most was the blind and unreasoning obedience which the masters demanded of their pupils. Reason and experience, his grandfather had taught him, were the only tests of truth, and he

refused to accept what his own intelligence did not approve. To develop the will before the mind, he said later, was to pervert the natural order instituted by God. His common sense was acute, and he was passionately in earnest in his search for truth. Mastering his distaste for the boisterous methods of debate of the classroom, he defended himself with an ability which impressed his opponents and with a civility which disarmed them. But he was one in a hundred; and he knew his superiority. He soon sickened of the schools. The strain of asserting himself and resisting his environment, the over-excitement of his faculties, told on his health, and he was forced to interrupt his studies. He came home, convinced that the world and its wisdom had little to teach him.

For relaxation he turned to his lute and cultivated music and poetry. But these recreations delighted him because he could pursue them in privacy. Nothing could wean him from his solitude. Once, he was persuaded to visit the Court — he could never be persuaded to return to it. The Court of Borso d'Este was the most pleasure-loving in Italy, and he had never learned to play. With the dashing youths who frequented it he could not compete; their manly exercises and mannerly graces were too strenuous for his body and too frivolous for his spirit; and he knew how cruelly conventional is youth, how intolerant of timidity or deficiency. He was in the first flush of adolescence, and the uneasy stirrings of

physical vanity made him sensitive to his inferiority. What figure could be cut among those naked athletes, racing and wrestling in porticoed courts, vaingloriously airing their limbs under the eyes of loitering ladies, parading in rounded loggias? or in the vineyards, where singing horsemen mingled with the vintagers, groping for grapes? or in the love-courts of *Belriguardo,* in those long formal alleys of clipped cypress, gushing with the rhythmic loquacity of voluble waters, where groups of lovers nestled, masking sedately the insinuating hands that stole about waists and between knees? Those scenes — so vividly frescoed on the walls of *Schifanoia* — wooed him only to wound him: the pleasures, the prowess, the passion, the pomp of youth, swept by him, a confident and overbearing cortege. In that dazzling physical world he was lost, and he rebelled blindly against its ideals. He was under a double disadvantage — physical and social. His family occupied an uncertain position between the middle classes and the aristocracy of birth; and he dreaded condescension on that score as proudly as he shrank from ridicule as a man. Of all forms of privilege, the tyranny of birth, breeding, and beauty, was the most intolerable — there was no appeal against it; and he willingly confounded it with the political despotism it adorned. In that hour the future democrat was born.

From the Court as from the Academy he returned, dissatisfied with the world. But he had no thought of

leaving it. On the contrary, he disclaimed the thought repeatedly. The profession to which he was destined — was it not also a ministry? His grandfather had practised it as such. The good doctor had tended the poor without stint and without pay, and had never wearied of exalting the charitable beauty of a calling which he ranked with teaching and preaching. Gradually, he accustomed himself to the world, and his early religious prepossessions passed away; life, but for its pleasures, grew quite comfortable. At last, even these lost their sting: he tasted, and suddenly the most profound of the passions engulfed him. The Casa Savonarola acquired, one day, a new neighbor in a Florentine exile of the illustrious Strozzi family. With him he brought a natural daughter. By what musk and rustle of silk the idle girl snared the homekeeping youth is a tale the dead need not tell: it is familiar. His window faced hers, over a narrow lane, and he failed to realize that anything further separated them. But the young lady knew very well who she was; she took an inordinate pride in her lineage; and it was only because the Strozzi and the Savonarola had nothing in common, that they met on friendly terms. But meet they did, and a change came over the unlimbered little scholar. It began to appear that he was not of mind all compact. His self-sufficiency deserted him, he was no longer his own master, and he began to expand. He found and lost his tongue with fitful rapidity, and his mother heaved a sigh of relief.

He nested in the window, and his sisters smiled. The thaw had been long in coming, but it had come at last: Nature had claimed her own. When he saw clearly into his heart, he lost no time in moping; his need was too new, his nature too prompt and direct for that. One day, from the window, he made his proposal of marriage. With a toss of the head, she dismissed it. Did he think — she put it to him — did he think that ' the blood and the great house of Strozzi would consider such an alliance? ' He was not a boy to let a girl have the last word — her folly called for correction: Scripture categorically recommended that the fool be answered according to his folly, lest he deem himself wise. " Bastard blood," he remarked; and slammed the window.

## III

He dismissed the incident and outgrew it. But the emotional shock arrested and transformed his development. Though he returned to his studies, he lost interest in them; the real bias of his nature was emotional, and it was only in activity henceforth that he could satisfy it. But what activity? The profession for which he was preparing no longer satisfied him; it was prosaic and unprofitable; duty kept his nose to the grindstone; but he grew restless — why or for what he knew not. His feelings, finding no outlet, wore themselves out in inward war; he was overwhelmed with a sense of confinement,

futility, and frustration; and it was no longer for activity that he longed but for refuge, rest, freedom, and peace. His mind began to revert to his childhood dreams of religion; but he brushed them aside. The cloister? — no — he shrank from it for his parents' sake and also for his own; for while he longed, ardently longed, to surrender his will, he longed too to assert it. He was confused, he was lost; despondency grew upon him; choler and melancholy crept into his heart.

Meanwhile that malapert presence next door continued to remind him of a defeat he was determined to dismiss and despise. But his love, mortified and ingrowing, exasperated his self-esteem, and he could not but dwell — not on the girl but on her faults. Her faults — he was resolved to be impersonal— it was her faults he detested: vanity, cruelty, frivolity, pride; they were the faults of the world, and he saw them everywhere. Like a true Italian, he poured his commotion into poetry, and in a poem on *The Ruin of the World* he lamented its universal corruption. One thought, and one only, gave him some cheer:

> In the next world full well will appear,
> Whose soul was noble and who rose on high,
> Winging in loftier style.

That was the only fitting, the only magnanimous rebuke. In the next world — ! But meanwhile there was this one, and in this one he was a misfit; daily he felt

it more deeply; for such as he there was but one asylum — the monastery. His virtues were his one superiority, and the world ridiculed and rode rough-shod over them. Every impulse of his nature, every precept he had been taught, were in contradiction to those of the world. "There all vices are lauded and all virtues derided. . . . To be rated a man, you must defile your mouth with the most filthy and brutal and tremendous blasphemies, and set on your neighbor to slay him, and sow seditions and brawls. If you study philosophy and the edifying arts, you are considered a day-dreamer; if you live chastely and modestly, you are rated a fool; if you are pious, you are dishonest; if you put your faith in God, you are a simpleton; if you are charitable, you are effeminate." Such were the complaints he poured onto paper in pages that accumulated and became a tract on *The Contempt of the World*. It was a world of boys, of full-grown boys, lusty, unruly, knowing no law but their instincts, their unfettered vitality; and he longed to rise and rebuke its unbridled insolence, to curb and crush it, to bury it under some cataclysm. He turned to the Bible and read and reread the chapters on Sodom and Gomorrah, on Egypt and Exodus; and in his day-dreams he saw fires and floods overwhelming his generation. But they were day-dreams; in reality he was impotent. He could but write — and rage. Rage turned to despair, and again his thoughts turned to flight. A verse of Virgil sang in his head: *Heu! fuge crudeles*

*terras, fuge litus avarum!* [1] For all his sincerity, his feeling was still literary; and the line expressed his melancholy so roundly and melodiously that he repeated it to himself daily, with tears in his eyes. He incorporated it, along with his reminiscences of Sodom and Gomorrah and Egypt and Exodus, in his tract; and in such exercises he worked off his pent-up feelings.

The days, the months, the years passed; and what was a normal crisis of adolescence, which might have worked itself out, developed, because of the morbid sensitiveness of his nature and the sheltered conditions of his life, into the settled conviction of manhood. His life was decided in the critical period of adjustment of youth; a greensick emotion determined his vocation. Gradually, a single thought obsessed him. His feelings were confused at the time, but in later years he remembered clearly how that thought took possession of his nature. " I began to reflect in my heart how we strive incessantly for unnecessary ends and neglect needful and useful ones. And considering how continually and violently we rush toward death, I determined to leave all else, to keep the end of man before my eyes, and to prepare myself for it with all my strength. . . Through God's grace, I began to despise all earthly things. An irresistible longing for my heavenly fatherland burned in my heart, and I resolved to serve my Lord Jesus Christ entirely." On a visit to Faenza in 1474 he was

[1] Flee the lands of the unfeeling, the shores of the grasping flee!

deeply moved by an Augustinian preacher, and made his decision. But it was a year before he acted on it. He was prudent, and he dreaded an irrevocable step; he was independent, and he dreaded the surrender of his will; he was affectionate, and he dreaded the blow to his family. Who would succeed him? Alberto, his youngest brother, was the most likely; but he was lazy, and it would be long before he could take his place. The fortunes of the family were declining; his father was in financial difficulties; his sisters were dowerless; his mother had a woman's pride of position and sense of the intrinsic respectability of money. His struggle was plain to his mother's eyes, she saw what was coming and admitted her dread of it; he reassured her with a vague, painful smile. She watched him silently, in mingled sympathy and apprehension; the quiver of the dragging anchor woke an answering strain in her heart, and her intuitions were quick. One day, as he sat strumming his lute, something in the dull ache of a single note warned her, in the hushed room humming with so many vibrations, that it had come. No words were necessary, no words were possible: she knew. " Son," she said, " this is a sign of parting." His finger continued to twitch the string; the aching note twanged monotonously; but he could not raise his eyes to hers, and in this speechless farewell they parted.

The next day was a holiday. The family left him among his books, while they went out to enjoy the

bonfires, the rockets, the pealing bells, in the stirring streets, dense with crowds pressing in from the country-side and swollen by travellers to the Roman Jubilee. In that bustling, loquacious, good-natured throng, strolling, laughing, singing, chattering, he was forgotten. When they returned, he was gone. For two days there was no word; on the third, a letter reached them from Bologna. " My honorable father," he wrote, " I know that you grieve greatly over my going, especially as I departed so secretly; but I want you to understand my purpose, so that you may be comforted and see that I have not been moved in this so childishly as some may suppose. First, as a man and one who despises perishable things, I expect you to be influenced more by truth than by feeling, as womenkind are, and to judge by the dictates of reason whether or no I should follow my purpose and flee the world. *In primis:* the reason which determined me to embrace religion is this: the great misery of the world, the iniquity of men, the lusts, adulteries, robberies, pride, idolatry, and cruel blasphemies, which have brought the age so low that not one man can be found more who does good; because of which many times a day I sang this verse, weeping: *Heu fuge crudeles terras, fuge litus avarum!* This is why I could no longer suffer the great evil-doing of the blind peoples of Italy; the more so, as I saw all virtue put down and all vice raised up. This is the greatest passion I could have in this world; and therefore I

prayed daily to Christ Jesus to raise me up from this mire and made continually my little petition to God with mighty devotion, saying: *Make known to me, O Lord, the way in which I should walk, that I may raise my soul to You.*

"Now God, when He pleased in His infinite mercy, showed me my way; and I received my answer, though unworthy of so great a favor. Answer me then: is it not great merit in a man to flee the filths and iniquities of this vile world, to try to live as a creature of reason and not as a beast among swine? And would it not have been the greatest ingratitude on my part to have prayed God to show me the straight way in which I should walk, and when He deigned to show it, that I should not accept it? Ah, dear Jesus, sooner a thousand deaths than that I should be so ungrateful! So that, my very dear father, you have rather to thank Jesus than to weep: He gave you a son, and preserved him very well for twenty-two years; and not only that, He even deigned to make him His militant cavalier. Think! Is it not a great honor to have a son serving Christ Jesus? But to be brief: either you love me or not. I know you will not say you do not love me. If you love me, then, since I have two parts, body and soul, either you love the body or the soul more: you can not say the body, because you would not love me, loving my vilest part. If then you love the soul more, why not seek the good of the soul? Surely you should rejoice and celebrate this triumph! I know

that the flesh must needs grieve somewhat; but it must be curbed by reason, especially by wise and high-minded men like yourself. Do you not think it cost me great sorrow to leave you? Surely; and you must believe me. Never since I was born have I had greater sorrow or affliction of mind, leaving my own blood and going among strangers, to sacrifice my body to Christ Jesus and to sell my will into the keeping of those I have never known; but at length, thinking how God calls me, and that He did not disdain to become a slave among us worms, I should never dare not to obey His most sweet and holy voice: *Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you,* etc.

"I know that you are hurt because I left you so secretly and almost fled from you; but so great was my grief and the passion I felt in my heart at leaving you that if I had shown it, I truly believe, before I had left you, my heart would have burst, and prevented my purpose; so do not wonder that I said nothing. I did leave some writings behind the books leaning on the window, which will tell you about me. I beg you therefore, my dear father, to make an end of lamentation and not to give me more sorrow and pain than I already have: not that I regret what I have done, for I will not undo it, not though I thought to be greater than Caesar; but because I am flesh like yourself, and flesh rebels against reason, so that I must struggle

cruelly, lest the Devil leap on my shoulders and down me; and the more so, as I feel your sorrow. These days in which the pain is yet fresh will soon pass, and afterward I hope you and I will be comforted in this world by grace, and in the next by glory. Nothing remains but to beg you, as a man, to comfort my mother; I beg her and you to both give me your blessing; and I shall always pray fervently for your souls."

In a postscript he added: "I commend my brothers and sisters to you, but especially Alberto; make him study, because he will be a great burden and sorrow to you, if you let him waste his time."

His advice was heeded.

## II

# *The Conquest of Eloquence*

### I

THE life of Savonarola was governed by a logic rarely discernible in the haphazard lives of men. Nor was it merely his own consistency which determined its design: a superior power seemed to be developing it, for its own purpose, to some predetermined conclusion. His fear of life found its fitting solution in his flight to the convent; and by all the rules it should have been final. But there was a sequel, and a sequel which was to demonstrate, with relentless logic, the futility of fleeing life.

Freedom and peace, he confessed later, were his quest. "To have freedom I would not take wife, and to find peace I fled the world and gained the port of religion." But it was only after a long struggle that he found freedom from the flesh. No sooner had the convent closed on him than he realized that life was still strong in him. Despite his assurances to his father that his decision was irrevocable, he was yet unsure of himself,

and he proposed to take the vows of a lay-brother. The grandson of Michele Savonarola, however, was too valuable a recruit to be left to such doubts, and he was 'led' to the ministry. The year of his novitiate was a strenuous one, a long struggle for self-mastery. What he dreaded above all in that difficult period of transition from the world was inactivity, with its besetting temptation to remember and repine. He was persecuted by the lamentations of his parents. They were inconsolable, and their letters revived his affections and harped on his doubts so insistently that, at last, in exasperation he was forced to lecture them sternly. "You blind:" he wrote. "Why do you weep, why do you lament? You hamper me, though you should exult and rejoice. What can I say to you, if you grieve yet, save that you are my capital foes and enemies to Virtue? If so, then I say to you: *Discedite a me, omnes qui operamini iniquitatem.* Get ye from me, all ye who work evil." But the flesh would not down; and to crush its unruly affections, he mortified himself with a zeal so immoderate that his superiors were forced to restrain him. With the same ardor he fagged at his duties as a novice. Nothing daunted him, neither menial labor nor mental drudgery. To wait on table, to wash feet, to clean privies, was a privilege; to be deprived of all reading but the rules of Order and the Lives of the Saints was a favor; and when, at the end of the year, he entered the school, it was almost under protest that he returned

to his familiar life of study. 'I have not entered the convent,' he said, 'to exchange the Aristotle of the world for the Aristotle of the cloister.' But he submitted — as a discipline. The Dominican Order enjoyed a peculiar repute for its learning; and he was already so well versed in the studies of the seminary — metaphysics, theology, natural science, and Bible reading — that he soon excelled his fellow-pupils. With his life as a student came privileges: he had a cell of his own, with a night-light to study by, and he was relieved of his choir-duties. But he refused to relax. His mortifications were incessant; in vain his directors restrained him; he found petty privations to practise, unnoticed. To save paper, he annotated his Bible with marginalia so minute as to be undecipherable; he slept but four hours a night; he surrendered even a crucifix, to which he was in danger of becoming attached. An unappeasable energy, ever on guard against weakness, gave him an uncommon strength, and his conspicuous sanctity inspired his directors at last with misgivings. He was in danger of misapprehending the purpose of monastic life.

For, after all, the rigors of a primitive cenobite were misplaced in the year 1477 A.D. in San Domenico di Bologna. It was the primary duty of a good Dominican to honor his God, his Order, and himself by his eloquence and learning. The fact penetrated slowly, and when it did, he began to wonder whether he had not

mistaken his choice of Order. As he rose in the ranks, he realized more and more that the dominating preoccupation of his superiors was to increase the influence, the wealth, and the learning of the convent; he was confronted, for the first time, with the monastic spirit, and it shocked him. He compared the lives of the Saints with those of his brothers, and the contrast was painful. Their tepidity of spirit distressed him; their infatuation with learning discouraged him. He had tasted its vanity in the world; and it was not for an intellectual but an emotional life that he had embraced religion. Had it all been a mistake? There were times when it seemed so; times when he felt that the world was still with him, concentrated into a microcosm in the convent. He could protest in but one way, and he did so — by redoubling his austerities. Gradually, an aura of sanctity gathered about him; he became one of the sights of the convent and originated amiable legends. Two monks from Vallombrosa, on a visit, long remembered their reception by the saint. They were wearing cowls of a costly cloth, and the fact did not escape his eye. It dilated in mild deprecation; and they were forced to explain, with some confusion, that the apparent extravagance was really a saving — the cloth was more durable. " What a pity," he remarked, " that San Benedetto and San Giovanni Gualberto did not know this secret. Who knows? Perhaps they too would have worn such a cloth." The rebuke was administered with a smile,

however; it was impossible to resent it; it became something to be cherished and remembered, with tender and meditative nods. They were assured, moreover, that his piety was genuine; his confessor found no taint in him even of venial sin. He was perfect; and in that satisfaction of vital vanity, he found peace.

## II

Six years that peace lasted; six placid years which he remembered as the happiest of his life. But the seed of their destruction was sprouting; as they drew to a close, life once more raised its head, and the interval was seen to have been only a truce.

The saint and the scholar were but forerunners of a final function: the preacher. The Dominicans were pre-eminently an Order of militant preachers. Their name proclaimed it: they were the *Domini cani,* the Hounds of the Lord. Their device declared it: the Dog with the torch in his teeth was a hunter. Every symbol, every study reminded the neophyte that to preach was his mission: the word of God must flame in his mouth, his light must shine before men. For this he was elected and trained, and it was that principle which informed all his studies: he was enlightened to illumine. Holiness and learning were perfections too personal to have value in themselves: here as in the world, merit and talent must culminate in action. The glory of God, the glory

of his Order, demanded it; and to fail in that function was to fall short of his mission.

To that call all the energies of the young Savonarola responded. It meant a future of self-fulfillment. If ever a man had been born to preach, it was he — he with his birthright of misanthropy, he who had suffered all his life from the world. By a providential grace, he had found a professional outlet for his ruling passion. To rebuke, to curb, to exhort, to reform a world which had outraged him so long was not only the heaven-sent opportunity but the obligation of his baffled life. For this he was called, for this he had suffered, for this he was born: to be transformed from a victim into a scourge. He prepared himself for his consecrated task with an ardor which absorbed his restless energy and which reconciled him to his uncongenial studies. They were no longer, in the light of their purpose, a distasteful discipline; he shone in them; and his duty became his pleasure.

It was only natural to assume that the model monk and the brilliant scholar would prove a peerless preacher and a credit to his Order. But his maiden efforts were unhappy. His voice was feeble, his delivery embarrassed, and his manner unduly earnest — he lacked something, which was apparently nothing more than experience or art. With characteristic determination he set himself to overcome his deficiencies. He took lessons of a professor in the University, who recognized his

ability and assured him that 'if he would add oratory to philosophy and theology, he would win immortal encomiums.' He worked with a will, but the laborious process of swelling his still small voice of conscience into a professional organ filled him with distaste. It smacked of insincerity; the calculated effects, the studied tones and gestures of rhetoric rang in his ears with a hollowness which made him doubly unconvincing to others. The fact that an element of insincerity is essential to the effect of sincerity in art was a stumbling-block which he could not surmount. He could not, he would not, temper his truth; to lay violent hands on himself was intolerable; and the fashionable oratory of the day, with its profane elegance, its classic allusions, its exquisite artifice, insulted his sense of propriety as deeply as it hampered his tongue. The professor lost his pupil; and when he reproached him with forsaking the rules of Priscian, he replied that he had returned to the Bible. The Bible stirred his heart, and his only hope of success was to expound it soundly, simply, spontaneously.

In the Bible he dwelt by preference on the wrathful passages of the Old Testament and the Apocalypse; they stirred a kindred eloquence, which he poured onto paper; and in the evening, when the brothers basked digestively in the courtyard, discussing the great world without, his ears burned with the occasional revelations of Roman abominations; his feelings swelled, and he re-

lieved them in little poems, in which he made ecclesiastical scandals scan. But the pulpit was a constraint; his sermons were as perfunctory and unimpressive as before. His repeated setbacks depressed him and filled him with a morbid sense of frustration. His high-strung will and sensitive nature, checked and shocked, lent to the problem a momentous importance, and it seemed that his mission, his life, hinged on the conquest of eloquence.

For it was monstrous that the gifts with which he had been so abundantly blessed should be thwarted and lost, because of so trifling an impediment; monstrous, mortifying; and his distress deepened when, after three years in Bologna, he was sent to Ferrara to complete his studies. While he was there, Father Vincenzo Bandelli, his lector in Bologna, came to Ferrara and engaged in a triumphant disputation in the Palace, in which, speaking with the tongue of men and angels, he gave a demonstration of what the Order could produce in the way of an orator. The example was crushing. Unkind friends, taking his measure in the pulpit, were not sparing of their comments. More than once he was told to his face that ' the brothers must be greatly in need of men ' — a taunt that stung. " It was as if they said," he admitted, " if they set so worthless a man as you to so great a task, they must indeed be pressed for workers." The only consolation he could offer his family was that no man was a prophet in his own

country. In Ferrara, moreover, the scenes of his childhood, the presence of his family, the old galling associations, deepened his discomfiture. He compared the past and the present. Had it all indeed been a mistake? He had returned, in every sense, to his starting-point: flight had been futile; he was as impotent as ever to rebuke the world he had fled. Failure: the problem that had forced him from the world confronted him again, with redoubled intensity, in the convent; he could flee no further; he was trapped and must fight it.

No one could help him, no one could teach him; he must forge his own art. An incident brought that fact home to him. He found himself one day on a boat among a company of soldiers, whose gaming and swearing suddenly stung him to anger. He sprang to his feet and rebuked them; the words poured from him pell-mell, in a torrent; and through his vehemence he became conscious of a new sensation. He had an audience. Taken aback by his outburst, the soldiers apologized and asked his blessing. It was a revelation. Speaking at white heat, from an overflowing heart, and bluntly, as man to man, he felt, for the first time, the promptings of his power. The triumph, to be sure, was momentary. In the pulpit, faced with humanity in the impersonal mass, his inspiration forsook him; and his eloquence vanished with the emotion which roused it. But the incident was an indication; in spontaneous feeling, in homely, hard-hitting sincerity, his strength lay. To

transpose those qualities to the scale of the pulpit, however, required an assurance which he was yet far from possessing; each new failure impaired his self-confidence, and their accumulation paralyzed him.

It was with relief, therefore, that he left Ferrara. In 1481 the inroads of war forced the Prior to disperse his flock among other convents and he was sent to San Marco in Florence. There his old master, Father Bandello, was installed as Prior, and he was appointed Lector to the novices, a post in which he gave great satisfaction. In the intimacy of the class-room he was at ease, and in the novices he found a simple and responsive audience. To them he expounded the Bible with the simplicity of heartfelt conviction and sometimes with an extraordinary personal emotion. Often he would appear in class with tears in his eyes, and take up the lesson, as an observer remarked, ' not like one who had studied but meditated it.' Particularly was this feeling apparent when he dwelt on the Apocalypse and the Old Testament and applied their irate parables to the present. Then he warmed to his subject; indignation was his talent, he was eloquent when he was scandalized. And in Florence he was frequently scandalized. The luxury and licence of its life furnished him with abundant illustrations of the sins which had called forth the cataclysms of the Apocalypse; and when once he struck that scent, the Dominican fervor awakened. But these flashes were fugitive, and they were limited to the class-

room; in that orbit he had found his level; and it seemed that he was destined to progress no further.

A year later, he was appointed to preach in San Lorenzo, and the result was disastrous. The old failure repeated itself, more conspicuously than ever. By the end of Lent his congregation had dwindled to twenty-five souls, and candid friends told him the truth: he had ' neither the voice, nor the gestures, nor anything whatsoever that was necessary to such an exercise '; ' he gave no satisfaction.' They urged him to desist, or to study the example of Fra Mariano da Gennazzano. This Augustinian preacher was a power in Florence; he represented its taste so completely that he captivated even the sophisticated and the sceptical. Politian had gone to scoff and remained to marvel. " I went," he wrote to a friend, " very ill-disposed and suspicious of his great fame. Hardly had I entered the church, however, than his habit, his face, and his figure changed my mind, and I immediately expected something impressive and grand. More than once, I admit, he seemed to me to swell in the pulpit to more than human dimensions. He speaks: I am all ears. I drink in his mellow voice, his apt words, his noble sentences. I discern the accents, I recognize the periods, I am dominated by the harmonious cadences. Nothing confused, tame, or dull. He unfolds his argument — I am convinced; introduces an appropriate story — I am interested; modulates his voice — I am charmed; is jocular — I smile; presses

me with serious truths — I yield to their force; addresses the passions — I weep; raises his voice in wrath — I tremble and wish myself away." Moreover, the secret of these beauties was his inward grace. The severity of his private life was exemplary: "yet there is nothing morose in his temper, nothing unpleasantly austere; nor does he think the charms of poetry and amusements of polite letters beneath his attention. . . . He neither repels his hearers by too undue severity nor misleads them by too much lenience. So many preachers fancy themselves lords of life and death, abuse their powers, cavil at everything, and weary men by their perpetual admonitions. Mariano is moderation itself. A stern censor in the pulpit, he no sooner leaves it than he becomes genial and courteous." Such was the Florentine ideal: grace, moderation, flexibility — it was through such virtues that the Word of God penetrated the sophisticated; and the end justified the means. His example was held up to Savonarola. "Father," said one of his friends, "there is no denying that your doctrine is true, useful, and necessary, but your manner of presenting it is lacking in grace, especially as we have before our eyes the example of Fra Mariano." He protested. "This elegance and ornateness of speech must yield," he said, "to the simplicity of sound doctrine." But the protest was vain: the results belied it. The simplicity of sound doctrine — as he preached it — emptied the churches; the art of Fra Mariano filled them. Popularity and

influence were the reward of an eloquence which satisfied local taste; obscurity and neglect the penalty of an artlessness which offended it. It was deplorable, but it was a fact: art was an indispensable condition of success in Florence. Everything reminded him of it. The very stones of San Marco spoke of that persistent solicitude of grace in austerity. The eurythmic composure of its cloisters, the maidenly brilliance of Angelico's frescoes, the gardens cluttered with antique statues where the *protegés* of the Medici came to study — all was art; and its influence cast a subtle and enervating spell, only too evident in the tepidity of the brethren. The urbanity of the great world and its insincerity went hand in hand. Certainly he did not begrudge Fra Mariano his favor; but he envied his power — his power to sway souls, of which he made so unprofitable a use. With his eloquence and his own sincerity, what might he not accomplish! — but they were incompatible. In the pulpit he was muzzled; he could not rise to the dominating scale of that little platform, raised by but a few steps above his public and by such an incommensurable distance above his powers. Amenity and grace and moderation and complaisance — those ideals he could not master: they were an ordeal to his soul. Discouraged, he determined to abandon the pulpit and publicly announced his decision.

He returned to his novices and his Bible. More and more he dwelt on the Apocalypse, more and more he en-

larged on the obliquity of the times, which he laid to the demoralization of the Church, itself too corrupt to curb them. For what did men go to service nowadays? For vain shows — for oratory, music, and ceremonies. For what did men enter religion? For benefices, soft living, and political influence. The Faith was dead, and the Church had killed it; the Church was infected, root and branch, by the materialism of the age. The scandals of Rome were a common stench; the good name of the Church had sunk so low that it was a commonplace to say of a priest that 'he had a good character for a churchman.' The clergy were a byword for parasitism and sloth; the populace mimicked the refrain of the convent bells with a shrewd and terrible humor: *Dando — dando — hand-out — hand-out*. Under such conditions, what could men go to church for but form and ceremony? It was a degenerate age, fit only for the brush-heap; the times were ripe for a cataclysm; and from a close study of the Laws of Providence as exemplified in the Bible, he deduced no less than seven reasons why the Divine Scourge might again be expected. It was the duty of a good preacher to call men to repentance, not to comply and flatter them with moderation and oratory: for 'it is a terrible thing,' he reminded his pupils, 'to fall into the hands of the living God.' He instilled into them a high sense of their mission; he exhorted them to study their Bible and, when their time came, to expound it simply, to cry out and

combat the age in the true Dominican spirit. With the tragic passion of a pedagogue who has missed his own life, he passed on to his pupils the torch he could not grasp.

His career as a preacher seemed definitely closed with his fiasco in Florence. He had failed too often, he had contracted the habit of defeat; and he was now on the threshold of middle age, when initiative slackens and hardens into habit. Yet something still stirred in him, an energy too great to be confined to the class-room, which grew morbid with stagnation. Brooding on his impotence and the corruption of the Church, he was haunted by visions, to which indeed he had been subject for years, but which were now colored by a single thought. Once, he was transfixed in a trance: the heavens opened and he heard a voice bidding him announce the coming of the Scourge which would chastise the Church. It passed; but it produced a sensation of transcending power; he was transported beyond himself; he was inspired with the gift of tongues.

On that perilous borderline where the wish sponsors the inspiration, he was steadied, however, by a vigilant guardian. Among his students was a young monk, Fra Silvestro Maruffi, who had been afflicted since childhood with somnambulistic habits. Humored for his infirmity, he had come to regard himself as a privileged character, and the liberties he took in his sleep taxed even the indulgence due to his ailment. He told tales on his

brothers; he stripped the Prior of his robes and strewed them about the dormitory; he stuffed the mouths of his comrades with sawdust from the spittoons; his habits at such times suggested, in fact, that his subconscious self was a monkey. But he laid all his antics to overstudy. He had other ape-like traits, in particular a prodigious imitative faculty. With the automatic memory of the feeble-minded, he repeated a sermon in German, of which he understood not a word. His occult disposition caused much speculation; in general, it was regarded as a pathological ailment; but at times he had visions of an edifying nature, which he was not unwilling to regard as revelations. Savonarola scouted the notion; he had no patience with superstition; and Fra Silvestro was in general quite sane about his visions. But for the feeble-minded the temptation to hallow their infirmities is a strong one; and Fra Silvestro was no exception. His visions might be due to his ailment or again they might not — he was not sure; but they gave him a sickly sense of self-importance, which gratified his vanity. Of one thing, however, he was sure: visions were his monopoly, and he tolerated no rival in his field. When his master began to have revelations, he nipped the idea promptly, and their positions were suddenly reversed. The irresponsible creature became all responsibility, all sanity; he knew this business of visions backward and forward; and he laughed at credulity. The result was unforeseen. Savonarola began to take a serious interest

in his pupil and to admit the possibility of his supernatural inspiration; and the somnambulist, mollified, repaid him in kind. Their rivalry became a friendly one, and a mysterious affinity developed between the invalid and the failure: a common need drew them together. For both the lure of the supernatural held a perilous fascination — the ineffable temptation to transcend their disabilities and compensate for them by an esoteric privilege. With their common craving for inspiration, however, went a mutual mistrust. Fra Silvestro never relaxed his vigilance over his friend. No sooner did the wings of imagination rise than, like a watchdog, he was upon them, bearing them down. A self-appointed guardian, Savonarola found him ever at his elbow, recalling him to reality — and yet at the same time sedulously seducing his sanity by his own occult suggestion. Their relations, shifting and ambiguous, veered between suspicion and sympathy. But they were partners unequally matched, and however Fra Silvestro watched, his superior outgrew him. For, after all, there were visions and visions — true and false — and if anything served to distinguish them, it was the purpose for which they were solicited. There could be no comparison between the self-importance of Fra Silvestro and the holy ambition to sanction his voice with supernatural authority of his friend. The somnambulist might be moved by vanity; but the apostle was prompted by conscience.

In 1482, at a Dominican Chapter in Reggio Emilia, to

which he was sent as the delegate of San Marco, Savonarola first attracted public attention. In that professional conclave, midway between the class and the pulpit, he spoke with vigor on the corruption of the Church. Among his hearers was an illustrious layman, Giovanni Pico, Count of Mirandola, who was immediately attracted to him. The prodigious learning which made Pico the wonder of his generation and an authority, even in his teens, on every subject he touched, gave a peculiar weight to his praise; and in that august assembly, it fell on its most obscure member. In the delegate from San Marco he recognized the one quality he lacked, and the one he most envied — conviction. For, with all his accomplishments, he was a dilettante. Busy and aimless, he had mastered knowledge in every branch, and nowhere had he found root. The bubble, reputation, mocked him. Everything which the world could offer was his — birth, beauty, fame, fortune — and still something eluded him, something which he felt, with overwhelming force, in that obscure friar. Fascinated by his faith, he sought him out; and it was with the enthusiasm of a discoverer that he returned home, singing his praise and declaring that ' he could not live without him.' But he was a very young and flattered man: his interests were multifarious; and he forgot his enthusiasm. The impact with that personality, however, stimulated his life and lent it a purpose, futile but ardent: to reconcile the religion of Christ, which he

revered, with the pagan philosophy in which he delighted. Such was the curious by-product of Savonarola's inspiration. For a moment recognition danced before his eyes; then like a firefly it vanished. But even there the controlling design was manifest; seven years later recognition came, through the influence of Pico; and it was not until then that Savonarola was ready for it.

In those seven years he developed slowly, gradually grasping and mastering the various strands out of which his power was compact — conviction, sincerity, supernatural claims, and emotional fervor. Too feeble for the critical public of Florence, he was relegated to the provinces. In San Gimignano, where he preached in 1484 and 1485, he created a stir by three prophetic propositions, which he based not on revelations but on Scriptural reason: (1) that the Church would be scourged and (2) regenerated, and (3) that this would come to pass soon. In Brescia, a year later, he made other forecasts, at first privately and then in public. A sermon in which he foretold the castigation of Italy and the destruction of Brescia was remembered twenty-seven years later, when the city was sacked by the French. The impression which these revelations made on the public was profound; it was even more so on himself. With success came conviction. Yet a little he hesitated, but not for long. His austerities waxed harder; nightly, he drew blood; once he sat for five hours in a trance; and at last the inner revelation came. As he was celebrating Mass

*Pico della Mirandola*

one morning, an unearthly lucidity possessed him, an overwhelming certitude that his predictions were inspired.

For the next three years, he led the life of an itinerant preacher, passing from town to town, footloose but gaining fame steadily. Among the simple populations of Lombardy, whose tastes he shared and whose dialect he spoke, he was at home, and he made an impression wherever he went by his sincerity and spontaneity. A new confidence possessed him, and freedom, and peace. When his mother urged him to visit Ferrara, he replied that he would do so willingly, but 'I bear far better fruit here than in Ferrara. There it would be with me as with Christ, of whom His own countrymen said: Is not this man a smith and the son of a smithy? But outside of my own country this is not said to me. On the contrary, when I depart, men and women weep and cherish my word highly.' He implored her therefore not to impede his mission. "You may be sure that I shall do all for you that I can and that it will cost me no effort to come to Ferrara, when it is necessary."

He had found his sphere, and his labors were profitable, but in the fullness of time he was called to a harder test. In 1489, he was recalled to Florence at the instance of Pico della Mirandola. In the intervening years Pico had met with reverses which quickened his religious spirit. Peerless in all things, he was not merely a prodigy of learning; in his youth he had been also a paragon of

virtue. But in this, too, he was a dilettante. The virtue of youth is a form of pride more akin to self-love than conviction; and his moral daintiness was, like the rest of him, without roots and without resistance. After a blameless youth, he was violated: a lady ran away with him. What made the scandal distressing — for it was a scandal — was the passive and inglorious part he played in it. He was the victim of a will-less amiability; and when the husband he had wronged complained, he returned the lady with the same civility with which he submitted to her advances. Florence laughed long and loud over his fall. He retired to his studies in confusion, throwing out, like a famous fish, a cloud of ink to cover his retreat. Six months later the learned world was deluged with nine hundred propositions, embracing the *omnium scibile,* which he offered to defend in debate against all comers. But here he ran afoul of the Vatican. Rome took exception to the orthodoxy of his propositions; he replied with a spirited defense; the Pope was infuriated; and there were threats of excommunication. The quarrel grew so serious that Lorenzo de' Medici was forced to intervene with the Pope. At the same time, other blows fell on him. Even his erudition was punctured; a Hebrew sold him the Cabala as the fabulous Books of Esedra. His deflation told on his person. He grew puffed and flabby, as if his inner vacuum swelled in a defensive inflation; he developed a double-chin; and he looked out on the world with the piscine eye of

a dowager, in glazed dubiety. The effect of these repeated blows was to make him extremely devout. He longed to convert the Hebrews. He grew also more critical of priestcraft. The doctrinal strictness of the Pope was so scandalously incongruous with the disorder of his personal life, that Pico became increasingly sensible of the hypocrisy and corruption of the clergy; he began himself to burn with a holy indignation. He remembered the Dominican who had caught his attention at Reggio Emilia and recommended him to Lorenzo de' Medici. Lorenzo was obliging, and when his friend suggested the recall of the friar to Florence, he willingly agreed. "With good ink and good will I am always ready to serve you," he said; and he directed his secretary to write to the Lombard Dominicans to that effect.

Under such circumstances Savonarola returned to the city he had left under a cloud of defeat. The cloud was lifting; he had found himself, he was ripe for recognition. And yet the attention so suddenly focused on him was a test; the scene over which the clouds were dissolving was brilliant but uncertain; the past was black behind it; but he braced himself for the effort.

He made the long journey on foot. Feeble with constant fasting and mortification, he succumbed to sunstroke on the way. He was revived by a traveller, helped to an inn, and accompanied to the gates of Florence. There, as his guide left him, he was overtaken by

another. Pausing for a moment to gather his strength, he heard a voice; and casting his eyes up, he was aware, in the dense sun overhanging the city, of a commanding presence in an oval of golden rays. His shadow vanished and in his ears a vehement voice sang: ' Remember to do what God has appointed you to do.'

## III

In San Marco everything was the same. The old familiar faces surrounded him once more — Fra Silvestro and the Prior and his students, grown now into his brothers — and no one welcomed him as a stranger, no one recognized the change in him. He returned to his old duties, reading with the novices, and the monotonous and mediocre routine of the past absorbed him once more. Everything was as it had ever been, as no doubt it would ever be. But the vehement voice still sang in his ears. His exhortations to his classes took on an eloquence which attracted attention not only in the convent but without it. Laymen came to his lectures, which grew into semi-public sermons; and his hearers overflowed into the garden. There, under a rose-tree, on fine Sunday evenings, he gathered an ever-growing group about him, and the broadening circle stimulated his powers. His words, addressed to that mixed audience, assumed a wider scope. Starting with the interpretation of a Scriptural text, he developed its applications to the present

and dwelt on the subjects which stirred him most — the obliquity of the world, the corruption of the Church, the decline of the Faith. Addressing himself ostensibly to his class, he spoke not only to be heard but overheard. His fame spread; it was the revelation of a personality, and one which fascinated by its difference from the accepted fashion. The garden became too small, and he was urged to preach. The opening had come at last. For a moment he hesitated. He deferred his decision overnight, while he prayed; but in the morning he appeared in an unusually cheerful mood and announced that he would preach not only on the morrow but for eight years thereafter.

It was a challenge, and a great crowd gathered to hear him justify it. The church of San Marco was thronged to the doors, and the convent turned out in force for the occasion. And indeed it was fitting that this pressure and solemnity should surround it: it was more than a claim for recognition, it was a tragic struggle to overcome a lifetime of defeat. Once more he stood, isolated and conspicuous, in a Florentine pulpit, challenged by a multitudinous sea of humanity to dominate it. Taking his text from the Apocalypse, he repeated his three propositions that the Church would be flayed, regenerated, and that soon; and as in San Gimignano he startled his hearers. Pressing his advantage, he developed his attack in a rapid and vehement improvisation. Those who remembered him from San Lorenzo saw

a new man, dominated by an overpowering personal emotion that inspired him with daemonic energy. He preached like a man fighting for life; he struck, exhorted, appealed, menaced; the words poured forth in a rhapsodic stream; he leaned over the pulpit, as if to seize the dense inimical mass at his feet and breathe into it his passion, to hypnotize it with his emotion, and to force it to feel with him. Like a castaway, gesticulating, exclaiming, struggling to rejoin humanity, he struggled for communion and response; and only when it came, only when he felt at last the hostile mass moving to his dictating emotion, he paused and drew breath — a long breath of victorious relief. For it was a triumph — the response came in a tide of exclamations and sighs; he had sprung the secret of the revivalist; he had tapped a great undertow of popular emotion; and henceforth he was to be its master and its creature.

It was the first of August, 1489; from that day he dated his career.

# *Part Two*

## III

# *Lorenzo de' Medici*

### I

THE new preacher who preached a new doctrine by new methods — 'in the Apostolic manner, without ornament, without intoning, without propounding problems' — but who electrified by his emotion, his sincerity, and his prophecies, created a sensation in Florence. The first stir of success grew into a full steady gale, which bore him along in its gathering volume for two years. By then he had outgrown San Marco and was preaching in the Duomo to ten thousand souls. This extraordinary popularity carried its penalty, of course, in detraction and ridicule. The critical dismissed him as a spellbinder whose vogue was due, not to his doctrine but to his visionary and emotional methods. To refute this charge, he published several small works on philosophy, which won him the admiration of Marsilio Ficino, the President of the Platonic Academy, and of Politian, who pronounced him a man 'of distinguished culture.' Nevertheless, the substance of their charge was borne

out by his manner in the pulpit. It was not for scholastic dissertations that the crowds rose before dawn, stood for hours waiting for the doors to open, and sat breathlessly imbibing his doctrine: it was not for his doctrine at all but for its delivery, for the mystic thrill of a revivalist meeting. When the sermon grew labored or abstruse, involved in scholastic allegories and indigestible obscurities, as it frequently did, he lost his grip on his public and was forced to revert to the emotional rhapsodies which fired it. The compulsion of his audience dictated his methods, and with the instinct of an orator he obeyed it; but in mastering it he became its creature; and this fact was of consequence in his career.

To move that anonymous mass of humanity he dramatized himself. He stampeded his hearers with his vehemence; he moved them to tears with his pathos. Especially in the solemn season of Holy Week were the scenes in the Duomo sensational. In the Lenten dark of the echoing dome, pricked with a few feeble tapers, a dense multitude swayed and moaned in hypnotized response to the voice that rose, in a long dithyrambic dirge, from the pulpit: "Weep, O my heart, weep, O my soul, weep, eyes, and accompany my sorrowing heart and soul; weep with me, great and small, women and men, sinners and just, rich and poor, religious and lay, for this most bitter death; weep, Heavens, weep, O stars, weep, Earth with every element, weep with me, every created thing, weep for pity of the cruel death

of Our Saviour! " Then, among the tombs, ran an indistinct murmur, which, if it were timid or sluggish, he whipped with anguished appeals, turning to the Cross and crying: " O Lord, I can bear it no longer! Sleep no more, sleep no more on the Cross, Master! Glorious Virgin! Blessed Saints in Paradise! Pray the Lord that He hear us! Do you not mark how the wicked rejoice and mock us? Put forth your Hand and prove your Power! I can say no more; I have only these tears. Not for my merits, O Lord, but for the love of your Son. Consider your Love, consider your Heart, consider your Bowels, consider your Compassion. Pity, pity, O my God! " Then the sighs, the rhapsodic sobs, the moaning *Miserere* broke forth; the organ hummed; he descended; and the crowd, shuffling and sighing, oozed out to restore its spirits, exhausted with hours of contrition, in the taverns and wine-shops.

That these scenes should invite ridicule was inevitable, and their adepts were nicknamed Piagnoni — ' snivellers.' But ridicule did not deter him. That emotional communion with his audience satisfied a profound need of his nature; it united him with his fellow-men, it relieved his loneliness, it healed his frustration; and when once he had tasted the heady power of dominating an audience, he could no longer live without it; he craved it with a hungry and connubial ardor. When his being flowed forth over the multitude, when he forced it to feel with him, when he reproduced himself

in thousands of responsive natures, then and then only he lived; and all his passionate and suppressed vitality was concentrated in the exercise of that power. The passion of oratory, inborn in the Italian, awoke; and his eloquence came to have a decisive effect on his conscience. Its mainspring was indignation, and constant exercise developed that passion into an obsession. Success, no less than defeat, created a constant preoccupation with evil in his mind; it was through his ruling passion that he ruled; he could never relax; and thus, by a rhetorical necessity, his conscience set.

It would almost be true to say that his indignation became a formula for effect. An element of the histrionic is, no doubt, essential to a popular and especially a religious leader; but it is most effective when he is unconscious of it. Savonarola would have been appalled at the suggestion that he was obeying the motives of an orator in laboring the sins of his generation; yet it was conspicuously true. Again and again, in later years, when he was beset with difficulties and dangers, he was tempted to desist from preaching; and the impulse which invariably urged him to persist was the spell of his public, the necessity of maintaining his ascendancy and his reputation. Of the true nature of that impulse he was only dimly aware; he realized merely that preaching was his life and that when he ascended the pulpit, he was ' possessed ' by a spirit, which unloosened his tongue in a reckless disregard of consequences. The

Spirit of God, he called it; he could not call it anything else; to have recognized it as the compulsion of an audience would have been to become, in his own eyes, a charlatan. Whenever that word was flung at him, he revolted in outraged sincerity; and to disprove it, all the rest of his life became a struggle to translate the triumphs of oratory into those of action.

## II

The triumphs of oratory were emotional, and as such they satisfied one side of his nature — the feminine side; but there was a masculine element in him which craved practical activity, which could only be satisfied by the actual realization of his convictions. Yet his convictions were the result of nothing more substantial than his feelings — of that early sense of misfit in the world, of difference from his fellows, of loneliness and defeat, which had driven him to the cloister. Those feelings had been partly allayed by his success; but the convictions which they begot survived as a habit of mind and a program to which he was committed; and the very momentum of success swept him on to attempt their practical realization. Only then would his passion be finally satisfied, only when he had remoulded men nearer to his heart's desire, only when he had re-formed the world to which he could not conform in his own image; and everything that was masculine, active, and

determined in his nature now rose to that struggle. His life, which had hitherto been purely subjective, now emerged into a sphere of objective realities; and to translate his rhetorical influence into a real power became his dominating problem. The first phase of that struggle was marked by his conflict with a man who represented to a supreme degree the realistic spirit of the world he had challenged — Lorenzo de' Medici.

Poles apart as they were placed by circumstance, they were brought into contact by the efforts of the preacher to translate his rhetoric into facts. As his success grew, Savonarola felt more and more its hollowness. He had his following, no doubt, and it was an enormous one; but his audience came to his sermons as to the play, for the thrill of an eloquent sermon, and his influence evaporated with his breath. He could not, like Fra Mariano, be satisfied with an oratorical triumph; his power had been granted for a purpose; but of his preaching he saw little fruit. Women flocked to his sermons. He satisfied their emotions; he championed the ideals of their sex. Preaching against all the vices which disintegrate the home — drunkenness, impiety, gambling, immorality — he was their natural ally against a common enemy, the free irresponsible male; and they supported him with all the conservatism, the partiality, and the passion of their sex. They worked for him; they brought him occasional converts — but how few! The meager result of his preaching often dis-

couraged him; he was tempted sometimes to desist; if this was success, it was no better than failure.

The obstacle to his progress, he repeatedly declared, was the decay of the faith. In one of his sermons he put it bluntly, " ' What do you think of this Faith of ours? ' one man asks another; and the other replies, ' Do not be a fool; it is a dream — a dream of women and monks.' " And for this unbelief he held the Church primarily responsible. In reality, the reason lay deeper; it lay in that quickened vitality of the age which had burst the bonds of creed, dogma, and moral codes, and made mere living once more the sole law of life. To that generation he preached the vanity and the contempt of life, the gospel of death; and it was inevitable that his labor should be sterile. But he did not look so far. For him the corruption of the clergy, their surrender to mundane ideals and practises, the betrayal of their profession, was the root of that scepticism and demoralization of the age which defeated all his efforts, and it was therefore upon that scandal that his attacks concentrated. The cult of ceremonials, the neglect of the spirit, the greed of gain, the sale of benefices, the immorality of the clergy — such were the themes to which he recurred again and again. From these he passed to the sins of the laity, to the prevalence of vice, gaming, blasphemy, usury, loose living; and from these again to the abuses of government, touching on tyranny, the oppression of the poor, and the moral responsibility of rulers

for the character of their peoples. Whatever his topic, it was informed always by the same purpose — to quicken the sluggish conscience of the age. But the task was stupendous, and his only force was his eloquence. To be effective it had to be sensational; he had to shock, to startle, to excite, by ever bolder and more amazing expedients; and he indulged more and more in the real stimulation of political criticism on the one hand and in the supernatural excitement of prophecies and special revelations on the other: but in particular of the latter.

To dominate by a supernatural stature became a need as imperative for his mission as it had been for his success as a preacher. But here he met with opposition. Fra Silvestro protested, in no uncertain terms, calling him mad to his face, and reminding him that he ' had always been opposed to such things and had even published a tract against the preachers of novelties.' Savonarola assured him that ' he was neither mad nor a dreamer '; the truth of his visions was confirmed; when they were genuine, he felt the Cross and the Holy Name imprinted in his breast. Despite these assurances, doubts continued to haunt the unsettled mind of the somnambulist; but the example of another monk won him. Fra Domenico da Pescia had earned the confidence of Savonarola by his blind faith, and it was only by a like trust that he could share it; and accordingly, when Savonarola urged him to pray for faith, he obeyed. His

prayer was answered: angels in a vision bade him believe; whereupon his master assured him that 'God loved him' and they were reconciled. Henceforth, however, he had to share his favor with Fra Domenico, and a triple bond developed between them, confirmed by angels, who linked their hearts with a golden chain. They shared all things alike, and in that curious pair Savonarola found the positive and negative poles of his faith. In the public there was a similar division over his visions. If they heightened his credit among the superstitious, they undermined it among the judicious, and he was forced to recognize that from the day he began to claim prophetic powers he was dismissed — the words are his own — as 'a simple soul.' The employment of prophecy in fact, defeated its own end; the suspicion of charlatanism thwarted his mission. It was as if the city of art had avenged itself on his sincerity, by forcing him to adulterate his truth with calculated effects, only to unmask their spuriousness. That small flaw in his integrity was to have a fatal effect on his career. By a natural reaction, he turned from the oracular to the actual and began to touch on political abuses; and here he found himself on more treacherous ground. Though his allusions were guarded and general, the authorities observed with concern the development of the mystagogue into a demagogue. When he referred to the sweating of labor and arbitrary taxation; when he complained that 'the poor with fifty florins' income pay

a hundred in taxes, while the rich pay little, because the rates are arbitrarily assessed'; when he lamented that 'widows come weeping and are told to go sleep, that the poor complain and are told to pay up,' he was rousing a response more genuine than by his visions and rhapsodies and one that could not be ignored. Imperceptibly there formed about him a current of political opinion, which identified him with all the malcontents of the Medici regime; and as his sympathies were plainly democratic, there grew up between the high-minded moralist and the immoral mob a paradoxical sympathy. Far-sighted friends saw the danger and urged him to desist from both politics and prophecy; but he found it impossible to draw back. His power, his popularity, depended on it; he was the creature of his own creation. He considered and re-considered their advice, but he always came to the same conclusion. He was prudent as well as impetuous, but the impulse which invariably triumphed was the deepest within him — contradiction. God bade him continue and he could not, in conscience, submit — "as often as I thought of pursuing another course, I came to hate myself," he said. Years after, he recalled the struggle he went through at the time. "I remember how, preaching in the Duomo in the year 1491, and having already composed my sermon on these visions, I considered suppressing it and abstaining from them altogether in future. God is my witness that I prayed all day and all night until dawn, and every other

*Lorenzo de' Medici*

way, every other doctrine, was denied me. Toward dawn, being weary and downcast with the long vigil, I heard, as I prayed, a voice saying: — Fool, do you not see that God bids you follow the same path? — And on that day I preached a terrible sermon."

Once in the pulpit, all doubts vanished; the compulsion of his audience — the sole law of the orator — and the commands of his conscience united to drive him on; in that terrific preachment, evoking the terrors of Divine retribution, he lashed out at all his dearest scandals — and corruption of the clergy, the oppression of the poor, the greed of the rich, the wantonness of his generation — and he concluded: " I did not wish to speak in Your name, O Lord, but You have been stronger than me, You have overcome me. Your Word is become as a flame burning the marrow of my bones; and because of it I am fallen into derision and opprobrium among men. But I invoke the Lord night and day, and I tell you: New times are at hand."

Boldness was, in fact, the best policy. Shortly after, he wrote to Fra Domenico, who was preaching in Pisa, " Our affairs are going well, because God aids us marvelously, though we meet with opposition among the great in the City, and many fear that we may meet the fate of Fra Bernardino " — a Franciscan friar exiled by Cosimo de Medici for preaching against usury; and as he labored it no less severely, the fear was not unfounded. " But I have faith in God," he continued, " He

gives me daily more courage and perseverance, and I preach the regeneration of the Church, basing myself on Scripture alone." If he compromised on his visions, he made no concession, however, in his political plain-speaking. He inveighed repeatedly against tyranny; and sooner or later the Government was bound to take notice of him. Several weeks later, it did: he was invited to preach in the Palace. He accepted the summons as a challenge and laid down to the Signori the duties of rulers and the rights of the ruled. And in addressing them, he addressed the man of whom they were but the tools and the figureheads, the invisible power whose demoralizing influence he felt on every side as a challenge to his own. His sermon became a homily on tyranny and an admonishment to — the Tyrant. "Magnificent Signori," he said, "I am here in the waters of Tiberias. Before the Signori I do not feel master of myself as in church. I must be more measured and urbane, as Christ was in the house of the Pharisee. All I shall say to you therefore is this: the good and the evil of a City depend on its head, and his responsibility is great even for small sins; if he followed the right path, the whole City would become holy. We must fish in this sea with nets that let nothing escape, not even the small fish, and we must not be too circumspect, but speak freely and openly. Tyrants are incorrigible, because they love adulation, because they will not restore ill-gotten gains. They give wicked officials their way;

they are led by flattery; they neither heed the poor nor condemn the rich; they expect paupers and peasants to labor for them gratis, or they allow their officials to oppress them; they corrupt the suffrage; they farm the taxes to oppress the people more and more. Your duty is to eliminate discord, to do justice, and to work for the common welfare."

He had all but named Lorenzo; but Lorenzo ignored him. This gratuitous and unprovoked attack by a man who had no personal cause to complain of him — whom he had even invited to Florence — was a new experience. He had been called a tyrant, by many men in his time, but always for a motive; and here he could see no motive but a disinterested zeal for principle. When his friends complained of the audacity of the Friar, he replied that he would readily overlook his incivility to himself, so long as he reformed the citizens of Florence. On that enterprise he wished him Godspeed. As for himself, he cared little for the fleabites of a professional moralist; he had been called many names in his time, and the most clinging, he remembered with that broad sly smile of his, was *The Magnificent*. And in magnanimity he was at his most magnificent; in that he was indeed a tyrant, and incorrigible. If anyone was distressed by the attack, it was Pico, who had induced Lorenzo to invite the Friar to Florence, and who certainly had not foreseen that he would take his host to task. It was embarrassing; it was painful; but

such were the consequences of dabbling in matters one did not understand; and of the workings of missionary conscience Pico had a very superficial knowledge. But one thing was plain: whatever truth there might be in his charge of financial mismanagement and abuse — and his championship of the oppressed did him honor — there was none in his judgment of Lorenzo the man. He had evidently formed a prejudiced and preconceived notion of him; and it was grotesquely askew. If only they could meet — ! And presently the occasion presented itself.

In July, 1491, Savonarola was elected Prior of San Marco. It was customary for the newly elected Prior of a convent built, endowed, and patronized by the Medici, to pay a visit of courtesy to the head of the House; but with this precedent he absolutely refused to comply. His monks remonstrated; it was incorrect, it was surely unnecessary to offend Lorenzo. But he was unmoved. Lorenzo, apparently, was very slow to take offense; and what was necessary was not to offend God. " I owe my election to God," he said, " and to Him alone will I profess obedience." His pride, his independence, his jealous suspicion of patronage flamed up; it was a question of principle. Lorenzo, however, viewed it in another light. " A stranger comes into my house," he said, when the retort reached him, " and will not even deign to visit me." It was not a question of principle; it was a matter of manners; and for that reason the

friction which ensued between them, though it might easily have waxed serious, developed into one of those quintessential comedies of character, in which the grave pages of History sometimes vie with the happy inventions of Art.

## III

It was a muted contention, never resolved, never reaching an open clash, indirect, glancing, and tentative. Lorenzo, who had to a supreme degree the *simpatia,* the ready give-and-take, of his people, was piqued by resistance. His charm, his generosity, his tolerance, his humanity — who had ever withstood them? The obduracy of the Prior was a challenge to his charm, and he courted an encounter. But the dignity of the wooer and that of the wooed made its management difficult. He walked in the gardens of San Marco, but the Prior remained invisible. He did not send for him; his tact forbade any show of pressure; the meeting must be casual and the reconciliation impromptu — for so he conducted all his affairs, and he never failed. As he loitered, his presence was reported to the Prior. " The Magnifico is walking in the garden." But the Prior was unimpressed. " Does he ask for me? " " No." " Then let him walk." And walk Lorenzo did, cat-like about the kennel, in wary curiosity; but in vain. An uncomfortable sense that both he and his opponent were playing a

very feminine game warned Lorenzo not to repeat the attempt. But he was still curious. He sent alms to the convent. On making his rounds one day the Prior found a pile of gold florins in his alms-box; and he noticed too that Lorenzo's Chancellor was in the offing, carefully surveying the scene. To the dismay of his monks, he sorted the gold from the silver and copper and directed that it be sent to a charitable order for distribution among the poor. " That fox," the Chancellor remarked to Lorenzo, as he reported the incident, " has a skinned tail." Lorenzo agreed and pursued the incorruptible Prior no further. Some time after, Pico della Mirandola made a large donation to San Marco, which was accepted; and the pointed discrimination left its mark. His mood changed, and he began to allude publicly to the pride of the man and the scandals he was disseminating among the populace. These animadversions reached the ears of the Prior, who answered them from the pulpit. " The Hound of the Lord does not cease barking, when he is tossed a bone," he said. It was a matter of principle.

Lorenzo knew very little of principles. Facts had made him a despot — the fact of inherited wealth and its responsibilities, which had forced the control of the government upon him as a boy, because ' wealth without power is insecure '; the fact of efficiency and its inevitable rewards which had made his rule popular: of what use was it to exclaim against such despotic

realities? Yet he knew, too, the mischief of words, especially of catchwords like Liberty and Tyranny, in Florence — in Florence so tragically incapable of liberty, so fatally infatuated with the name of it. He knew it so well that he had never assumed the title or the appurtenances of a ruler, that the Republican façade remained intact, that he was merely the First Citizen with an influence in making appointments to office, that he carried his democratic simplicity to such lengths that anyone could buttonhole him on the streets, that he sedulously respected in great things and small the appearance, which mattered so much more than the substance, of Liberty. But that was the danger of Savonarola. He was a doctrinaire, pathetically duped by words, and he was agitating the most misleading of all words with his reprobations of tyranny and his allusions to 'this ghost of a Republic.' He was irresponsible and officious; and the loftiness of his motives only made him more mischievous. Where Lorenzo had responsibilities, he had only a mission — the self-constituted mission of an idle evangelist. But he had an uncanny faculty for nosing out grievances. To harp on the burden of the poor, to exploit the inequalities of the tax system — how easy to make capital of such matter! Attacked on the financial side of his government, the Magnificent was at a disadvantage. The system of arbitrary taxation was one of the most effective controls by which he exercised his invisible power,

disciplining his opponents and favoring his friends; and his enemies of course, made capital of it as an example of his tyranny and corruption. His enemies — as every well-informed Florentine knew — were a minority of self-seeking politicians, hungering themselves for the spoils of office; but they found a mantle in the integrity of the Friar. Lorenzo saw what had happened: he was a foreigner, who had formed the wrong connections in Florence; he had been hoodwinked. It was easy to enlist the sentimental sympathies of a humanitarian monk, and to excite his indignation over the oppression of a disaffected minority. Lorenzo was too prudent a statesman not to view this embryonic movement, with its semi-political, semi-religious complexion, with misgivings. His personal popularity and the settled prosperity of Florence would suffice to neutralize it, no doubt; but he looked to the future. It was the peculiar virtue and infirmity of his power that it was personal and unofficial. Popularity was its base; and though his popularity had never been greater than now, he was in ill health, and his son Piero was an inexperienced boy, who sometimes filled him with anxiety. It was by no means certain that when his time came to grasp the reins of power, he would wield them with the seasoned prudence of his father. Lorenzo was forced to recognize, in common prudence, that the Friar was a subversive influence.

But he did not act at once. After his rebuffs, he left the Prior severely alone. He was loath to be severe. His

principle — so far as he permitted himself to have one in anything so fortuitous as life — was to live and let live; and all he required was a little discretion. He recognized his virtues. Pico dinned them into his ear. One story, in particular, the Count was never weary of repeating — the story of how he had pressed the Prior to accept five hundred florins for the relief of his family, who were in need, and in vain; but such virtue left Lorenzo cold. He admitted, likewise, his disinterestedness; but he smiled, perhaps, at that delicate vanity of the spirit. It was a barren virtue, a peculiarly futile form of sentimentality. Self is the only sincerity; Nature blesses it; it is fruitful; while she lays the blight of barrenness on all such conceits as are irrelevant to her purposes. Furthermore, he had his own delicate vanity: he prided himself on his magnanimity. But he suffered from gout, and that malady of princes gives a quick twist to their tempers; and his aches and his prudence finally got the better of his patience. He determined, gently but firmly, to drop a hint.

One day the Prior received the visit of five gentlemen, who were patrons of the Convent. In his own interest they urged him to consider the impropriety of his meddling in politics and the uneasiness which his prophecies caused in the popular mind. In his own interest they spoke, and on their own initiative, they protested; but the five with but a single thought wore tell-tale faces. And when they hinted at the possibility of exile,

unless he moderated his tone, he was sure. " You come from Lorenzo," he said; whereupon they protested. " You say that you have not been sent; I tell you you have." Then he rebutted their charges. His prophecies of the renovation of the Church, he said, ' disturbed only the weak '; and he denied that he had concerned himself too much with politics, pointing to the example of many illustrious clerics who had intervened in secular affairs — St. Dominic, St. Peter Martyr, Cardinal Latino, St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Antonine. " Tell Lorenzo," he continued, " to do penance for his sins; for God will punish him and his. I do not fear your banishments. Your city is like a grain of lentil in the ground; the new doctrine will triumph and the old one perish. Though I am a stranger here, and he a citizen, and the foremost in the city, I shall remain and he will go. I shall remain," he repeated, " and he will go." And lest their discretion temper his valor, several days later, in the presence of witnesses, he took occasion to predict the imminent death of Lorenzo, the Pope, and the King of Naples.

The next move was Lorenzo's and, not unnaturally, it was an attack on his power of prophecy. This commission was entrusted to Fra Mariano da Gennazzano, who embraced it with alacrity. The unrivalled orator had seen himself slowly eclipsed; the days of his glory when deliciously he had basked in Politian's praises, were no more — *tempi passati, tempi passati.* To have

been once the cynosure of all eyes, delicately appreciated by a connoisseur who catches every subtlety, and then to be obfuscated by a caterer to the groundlings, was to know the vanity of human fame. The opportunity to puncture his rival in his weak point found him ready. Choosing as his text Acts I, 7: *It is not for you to know the times and the moments the Father has fixed of His authority,* he prepared his sermon. A picked audience assembled in his own church of San Gallo, which Lorenzo had built for him; his patron, Pico, and Politian were present; he was among friends, and he let himself go. But alas, the years had done their irreparable damage to Fra Mariano; he was a changed man. Swans hiss; and the stately grace of the peerless orator burst into a vicious sibillation. Lorenzo had expected of his moderation a sermon which would put the prophet quietly in his place, with the finality of perfect poise, proportion, and point; instead, he was shocked by an explosion of breathless malice and scurrilous extravagance. The public was disgusted; and the only result was a reaction in Savonarola's favor. Fra Mariano attempted to repair his mistake; in a panic of erratic and fowl-hearted cordiality, he invited his rival to celebrate Mass in his own church. But it was too late. On the following Sunday, Savonarola preached his sermon on the same text; and the disgraced orator betook himself to Rome where, in time, he found ample opportunity of satisfying his revenge.

Lorenzo accepted his defeat and interfered no more with the friar; and the friar, on his side, gave him no more cause for complaint. Their conflict relapsed into its latent and inactive state; but it was rooted in too deep and incurable an antipathy not to break out in a final illuminating flash. Their geniuses were incompatible; there would have been something forever lacking in the logic of their lives, had they not met in an ultimate test. Savonarola was all principle, Lorenzo all expediency. The practice of politics had taught the prince the complexity of human affairs, and the necessity of compromise had left him without a principle. The versatility of his interests had done as much; he was too many-sided and open-minded to be capable of conviction; for the convictions of a man are his limitations. He was the soul of worldly wisdom, of expediency, of compromise, an opportunist who had succeeded by steadily adhering to the possible. This practical, protean, and unprincipled spirit was a provocation to Savonarola; it challenged his absolute. Conscientious, visionary, and single-minded, he was its antithesis. Animated less by mind than by feeling, the moralist, confronted with the complexity of life, is forced to simplify it by rudimentary principles, by the elementary black and white of right and wrong — of which life knows nothing. The lack of principle of Lorenzo was a standing challenge to his moral passion, and to it he attributed all his impediments in Florence. He held the

prince responsible for the demoralization of his people. The good and evil of the city, he told the Signori, depended on its head; and in the licentious influence of Lorenzo he saw the pernicious source of that hardened conscience which he struggled in vain to quicken. On political grounds he opposed him no less implacably — and likewise on principle. Lorenzo was a tyrant; he had deprived Florence of liberty; and liberty was indispensable to the responsibility and self-respect of the good life. That Florence was incapable of liberty, that it invariably spelled faction and anarchy, that the paternalism of the Medici was a political necessity, were facts which fitted ill with his principle: he ignored them. He reduced the problem to a moral one, and in Lorenzo's personal ambition saw the sole explanation of a system which had grown up in response to political necessity.

Their final encounter took place at the deathbed of Lorenzo; and it was in a forlorn attempt to reconcile the feasible and the absolute that they met in a supreme deadlock. In April, 1492, the Magnificent was dying. For a month he had felt the approach of death, and when his son Giovanni left for Rome, he took a final farewell of him. He was ready: the crowning ambition of his life was realized — Giovanni was a Cardinal. Now, in his villa of Careggi, he lay, propped up in a great canopied bed, awaiting the end. It was Spring — Spring with its whimpering winds, its

pencilled foliage, its luminous horizons — but the casements were closed, and no breath penetrated the hermetically sealed sick-room where, with lax hands loose on the counterpane, he lay daily sinking. On April 8, the end was at hand and he sent for a priest. When he came, he tumbled from bed, insisting that he must meet his Redeemer on his knees, but his strength gave way, he was lifted back to his pillows, and, clutching a crucifix, he received the last rites on his back. For some time he lay exhausted; then something rallied in him; and he asked that Savonarola be sent for.

The Prior, on receiving this message, replied that anything he might say to Lorenzo would be unwelcome and useless. But the dying man would not be denied and sent again for ' the only honest friar he knew '; and this time Savonarola came.

What ensued is doubtful. Politian, who was present, states merely that Lorenzo expressed a desire to confess and that Savonarola encouraged and prayed with him. Many years later, however, an apocryphal story was circulated by his disciples which, whether or not true, sums up their irreconcilable differences with inspired insight and tragi-comic finality.

According to this account, before accepting his confession, Savonarola exacted three conditions which he told off on his fingers. Lorenzo breathed feebly and bade him name them. " First," said the Friar, " a great and living faith in God's mercy." The dying man

acquiesced. "Second, that you return, or cause your heirs to return, all your ill-gotten gains." Lorenzo was silent; then, with a meek sigh, he assented. "Lastly, that you restore the liberty of Florence." Then, with one long incredulous look, Lorenzo turned his face to the wall; such implacable pedantry was too much for him; he fell into a swoon; and that night he died.

## IV

# *Monastic Reform*

### I

THE scene at Careggi was — whatever else — a moral victory for Savonarola. His prestige was enormously enhanced by it. He had been uncompromising, and Lorenzo, in summoning him to his death-bed, had publicly acknowledged his integrity. On his side, the Friar paid tribute to the prince. Never had he known a man, he said, more gifted in the temporal sphere, and he only regretted that, for his spiritual welfare, he had not been called in sooner.

Henceforth the Prior of San Marco was recognized as the spokesman of republican sentiment in Florence. But he held aloof from politics; they were not his province; he was concerned only with their ethics; and under a less tolerant Medici his moral victory might have been less happy. In another field, however, he profited by his new authority. The death of Lorenzo had fulfilled one of his predictions; three months later, another was realized with the death of the Pope. His

credit as a prophet grew; and with it his claims. Hitherto, he had observed a prudent ambiguity as to their source, falling back, when hard pressed, on reason and Scripture; but he now advanced his predictions confidently as divine revelations. By a natural reaction, he turned again from the natural to the supernatural; for, in returning to his proper field and renewing his attacks on the corruption of the Church, he had no other weapons but visions and prophecies to combat the conditions prevalent in Rome.

Attention had been focused on those conditions once more by the death of the Pope. The reign of Innocent VIII had been scandalous. A notorious nepotist, he was the first Pontiff to openly acknowledge his paternity; and the sole policy of his pontificate had been the aggrandizement of his family. No one was shocked by it; it was the recognized purpose of every Pope; so much so that when he failed to provide for a son who had married Lorenzo's daughter, the latter wrote to remind him of certain plain facts: 'men are not immortal, a Pope is what he chooses to be, he can not leave his pontificate to his heirs and can call nothing his own but honor and glory and what he does for his family.' A striking incident epitomized this state of affairs. Shortly before his death, the Pope had fallen into a cataleptic trance, which had been mistaken for death; when he awoke, he found the apartment stripped and his household packing and preparing to decamp with

the spoils. His successor promised no improvement. The private life of Cardinal Borgia was disreputable; his election was rumored to have been bought; but simony and immorality, like nepotism and greed, were by now accepted practises in the Papal Court. The change of Pontiff meant little; the conditions remained; and it was against them that Savonarola inveighed. He traced them all to one fact — the temporal power. The Donation of Constantine, he declared, had poisoned the Church. As a political institution, it was infected perforce with secular ambitions. Its unbridled immorality, even from a temporal point of view, was impolitic; it had undermined the moral consent on which, in the last analysis, its power rested. The only remedy — it followed from elementary logic — was a return to the primitive Church. But the logic was too elementary. To expect an institution, which had grown up by a complicated historical process, to revert to its pristine state was to expect manhood to revert to infancy; only a miracle could accomplish it; and by the same logic he was forced to employ elementary methods to advocate it — visions and prophecies. In 1492 Florence was startled by two of a peculiarly vivid cast. In the first, which he received on the eve of a sermon, he beheld, against a lowering sky, a sword suspended over Rome; thunder rolled; and a voice cried, '*Lo, the sword of the Lord swift over the earth and sudden.*' The second was of a similar tenor. A white cross bearing the legend, *Crux*

FRA BARTOLOMMEO

*Saint Peter Martyr in the Likeness of Savonarola*

*Misericordiae* Dei, rose above Jerusalem, worshipped by the nations of the earth: while above Rome, a black cross soared, bearing the sulphurous words, *Crux Irae Dei;* the air was dense with darts; thunder rolled, and the Voice bade him foretell the imminent flagellations and call men to penance. But he was a voice crying in a wilderness. The employment of prophecy was a habit of many preachers, and usually of provincial ones; it was ill considered; and his visions produced merely one more sermon. If anything proved him a prophet, it was their effect: they were applauded and ignored.

Incapable of arousing even contradiction, he lashed his impotence and the complacence of the world with fierce and disheartened protests; but the futility of his words rang in his own ears. Then the usual reaction set in. " Works and example," he exclaimed, answering his despair, " speak louder than words." On that inspiration he acted. What he could not accomplish by words, he would attempt by works — on a small scale — the magnitude of the problem made anything else impossible. The huge, complex, corrupt body of the Church was impervious to his voice; but one thing he could do: he could begin at the bottom, he could reorganize a little community, he could reform San Marco. It was a modest ambition, but it had a great merit: it was feasible. The reform of his own flock became the solution of all his problems: an outlet for

action, a release from words, a test of his ideals. The wisdom of cultivating one's own acres — the melancholy wisdom of middle life — came over him like a revelation.

His first step was characteristic. He proposed to abandon the convent itself. San Marco, with its profane associations, its priceless library, its frescoed cells, its cloisters crowded with armorial bearings, its gardens cluttered with nude and unbaptised marbles, was too mundane; in that environment reform was defeated at the start. He determined to retire to a hermitage with a few chosen disciples. " When Jesus came to renew the world," he said, " He found faith only in Judaea, and even there few followers. But He summoned them to a mountain and with them transformed the human race." He would do likewise. " You forsake me, you mock me, and I will form some few disciples who will renounce all for Christ Jesus. They will seek no benefices nor prebendaries; they will not accept gifts or alms, but only their daily bread. They will dress poorly; they will not seek out the great; they will not run after magistrates in the Palace; they will not build; they will not visit women every day to give them pictures and crowns. They will be honest; they will mount the summit of faith; they will have divine revelations and much science, but not that of Scotus and the poets, but that of their own conscience and Holy Writ. And " — a final word of discouraged wisdom — " they will not reveal

their visions, until all things shall proclaim the glory of God."

He set to work with all the ardor and pertinacity of his nature. Money was raised among friends of San Marco and a plot of ground purchased at Monte Cano, overlooking Careggi — an appropriate site. The new house was planned with primitive simplicity. Of wood or brick; of a single storey; with unbarred windows; without cells — mere partitions of matting or board; without ornament of any kind beyond a rare devotional picture; it was designed in every detail to conform to the rule of plain living and high thinking. There, and only there, it might be possible to lead the Christian life. Describing that life to a friend, he said, "When the new house is completed, others will come and ask to speak to our fathers; and the porter will reply: Are you simple? "; whereupon his friend declared that in that blessed time, and not in this tepid one, he would join them. He did well to wait. The virtue of the scheme was its failing: it was too simple. *Sancta simplicitas!* The host had reckoned without his guests. As its rigor was realized, the older brothers protested. It would be a slaughter, they declared, 'a slaughter of the tender youth of the flock.' But he pressed on: the ground was cleared, a chestnut wood felled, the money subscribed: the dream was almost within his grasp. But even for the pursuit of poverty money was necessary, and when the malcontents persuaded the backers to withdraw their

support, the scheme collapsed. All that remained of it was a patch of bare ground lying on the slopes of Careggi — the grave of a dream.

He profited by the set-back. Resistance only deepened his determination; but he modified his method. It was all for the best. It would have been too easy, no doubt, to have succeeded under the conditions he had planned; he was called to a harder struggle. Christ, by ascending a mountain, transformed the human race; but in San Marco Savonarola was forced to compromise. He developed unexpected powers of conciliation and even of inconsistency: the reform, in short, was mutual. He compromised on the very point he had aimed to suppress — the ceremonials of monastic life. They were too rooted a habit, and he found that they had their uses. Vainglorious they might be, but they kindled a pious enthusiasm. Then, blazing in hallowed silks, the community perambulated about the cloisters, singing their Lauds, while curious outsiders peered through the doors. For the scenes were singular. A child was sometimes introduced to represent Jesus, while a young novice assumed the role of His Mother. Blushing demurely, the youth smiled, with downcast eyes, as the monks circled around him, naming him their '*mamma*.' Careggi could not have been more simple.

Indulgent to others, the Prior was strict with himself. His austerities remained unabated. He slept but four hours a night; he ate the coarsest bread, passing

the finer, when it was set before him, to the feeble and old; and he touched no meat. In time, he lost all sense of taste. He preached rigor by practising it. When rebuke was necessary, he rebuked by example. He insisted on cleanliness: he could not stomach the odor of sanctity. When the novices neglected their sanitary duties, he said nothing; but one night they discovered him stealing through their dormitory; and when they followed him, they found him attending himself to their malodorous duties. It was inevitable, human nature being what it is, that such saintly humility should sometimes be abused. Returning one day from a sermon, he repaired to the kitchen; the cook forgot him; and two hours later he was still sitting meekly at the door. His longsuffering was taken for granted. But it was never exhausted. He was never irascible — outside of the pulpit. In private life, an entirely different nature revealed itself, a nature submerged and sweet which suggested that, but for the exacerbations of the world, such he would gladly be. Winning and gentle, he won the sympathy of all who came into contact with him. With the young he unbent with a tenderness which could even be playful. Coming once on a novice, who was struggling with his gown, he helped him into it with a happy sigh. "Did I not tell you," he teased, "when I gave you this gown, that you should have brought your nurse with you?" He was cheerful — on principle. That was perhaps his hardest discipline. When the Demon of

Melancholy rode him hard, he tamed him to his purposes: in the pulpit his familiar spirit was given his freedom and served him well.

Often he led his flock out on the hills, where they would sing Lauds or dance rounds or debate delicate theological problems among the butterflies. He knew the value of relaxation; but he put it to edifying uses. Sitting in a circle on the greensward, his novices would propound two *doubts,* one of Heaven, one of Hell, which he would answer; or he would pluck figs and mould little plump doves out of the sticky pink pulp, on which he would comment in the literal and spiritual sense; after which they were partaken of in the literal sense. At such times, the Prior would sometimes be seen, gazing away toward Careggi; but it was without regret: something of the dream, modified, imperfect, but real, had survived.

Of those idyllic days Fra Benedetto preserved an imperishable memory. " If it is possible for a man to see Heaven on Earth, we saw it then in San Marco, in those happy and blessed days," he wrote. But these amiable methods of reform had their drawbacks. He was willing to propitiate human nature but not to pamper it, and there was a marked tendency among the tepid to take the pleasant side of his program and leave the rest. The human animal went its own way stubbornly: it resisted the bit, and it lay down under indulgence. The gentle virtue of his own example was not sufficient

to reform his flock; it was necessary to return in time to the strenuous ways of force.

For the initiation of any sweeping reform, however, he lacked authority: such measures required the sanction of his Lombard superiors, and with them he had been engaged in constant disputes since his election. His administrative independence was essential to the attempt. He had other reasons as well for desiring it. The constitution of his flock was a handicap. Drawn from various provinces, its diversity was a source of disunion. Not even the cloister could extirpate the antipathies existing between men of different provinces. The fierce parochialism inveterate in Italian life broke out again and again; different tastes, different tongues, different habits, were intensified by the close quarters of the convent. Especially in matters of food were these disputes painful. The Tuscan had his tastes, the Lombard his liver; and men who fasted together without friction could not feed together without falling out — no matter how frugal the fare. The cook — the eternal scapegoat of a community of men — led a trying life.

For all these reasons, he determined to secure the separation of the Lombard and Tuscan Congregations of the Order. Originally distinct, they had been united in an emergency forty years before; he was dependent therefore on a set of distant officials on whose sympathy toward his proposed reform he could not count.

Furthermore, through them he was at the mercy of political intrigue. In the Lent of 1493, he was transferred to Bologna at the request of Piero de' Medici.

The son had none of the reliable ironic forbearance of the father. Though Savonarola had withdrawn from politics, his reputation as an opponent of the Medici made him suspect in the eyes of the young prince, and the past overtook him, just when it seemed well buried. A series of mistakes had made the young man unpopular. The blood of his mother — the turbulent and arrogant blood of the Roman Orsini — predominated in his veins; of his father he had the physical strength but none of the brains. Overbearing and violent, he had attempted to lord it in Florence with the feudal insolence of a Roman Baron, and in a brief year had undermined the popularity laboriously built up by three generations of Medici. He had quarreled with his family, offended the people, and antagonized two of the traditional allies of Florence, France and Milan. These mistakes had given a fresh impetus to the enemies of the Medici, and it was as one of their number that, on his past record, Savonarola incurred his displeasure.

From Bologna the Prior wrote to his flock with homesick solicitude. "I think constantly of your tender charity and speak of it often with Fra Basilio. We are much alone here, like two turtle-doves awaiting the Spring to return to the warm places, where we were

wont to live among the flowers and favors of the Holy Ghost. But if you are overmuch grieved and find it impossible to live without me, your piety is imperfect, and therefore God has taken me from you for a time." In Bologna his experiences were unhappy. The academic public before which he had made his debut as a preacher did not reverse its opinion on his return. He was pronounced 'a preacher for women.' Before he left, however, an extraordinary incident gave him a sensational notoriety. The wife of the tyrant, arriving late with a large and noisy retinue, had repeatedly interrupted his sermons. On the first occasion, he had marked the offense by pausing in his sermon; on the second, he requested her not to disturb the devout; but on the third, he exploded. " See," he cried, pointing an indignant finger at her, " see where the Devil comes to interrupt the Word of God! " The infuriated woman urged her escort to assassinate him on the spot; but the soldiers shrank from sacrilege. Several hours later, two *bravi* penetrated into his cell; they were outfaced, however, by his unflinching calm. When he asked them their business, they faltered that they had come to seek his pleasure: they, their masters, and the city of Bologna were at his disposal. Lent was over, and on the following Sunday he took leave from the pulpit. " Tonight I leave for Florence," he said, " with my staff and my wooden flask. I shall spend the night at Pianoro. If anyone has anything to say to me, let him speak before I leave.

Know, however," he concluded, " that my death will not be celebrated in Bologna."

His experience in Bologna made it more than ever imperative to emancipate himself from the jurisdiction of his Lombard superiors. On his return to Florence he immediately set the negotiations afoot. They involved him in ecclesiastical politics and brought him for the first time into contact with the Vatican. This might have been embarrassing, since he was still inveighing against Rome from the pulpit, but he was fortunately spared the necessity of conducting the affair himself. The opposition of the Lombards was violent and powerful; they were represented in Rome by Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, the brother of the Regent of Milan and the Papal Vice-Chancellor; and to offset their influence he was forced to accept the patronage of the Medici. Piero, suddenly reversing his attitude, determined to favor the Prior. Moody, veering, and inconstant, his reasons were always in arrear of his impulses; but he had excellent motives for changing his mind. It was politic to conciliate the Prior — and it was a pleasure to combat the Lombards. Ludovico of Milan was a personal rival; the opportunity to pique him was not to be missed. Accordingly, he enlisted the aid of his brother, the Cardinal; the Government wrote in behalf of San Marco; the Florentine Ambassador pressed the petition; and Savonarola found himself the center of a far-reaching and intricate professional intrigue. Trusting in

God, he entrusted his cause to the hands of diplomats and churchmen. They were in their element; for them it was a professional game, in which the issue meant less than the zest of the conflict: a matching of influence and wits, which exercised all the talents of cajolery and chicanery, of wire-pulling and patronage, for which an entire class was trained and in which it delighted. Over the independence of San Marco prelates and princes manoeuvred and plotted, with determination and with wiles, not knowing well why, nor caring, but thoroughly exercized in their professional pride. Accumulating adherents on both sides, the question grew into a momentous and trivial intrigue of State. On the one side, Cardinal de' Medici, the Florentine Government, and Cardinal Caraffa of Naples, the Protector of the Order; on the other, Cardinal Sforza, his brother of Milan, the Vice-Vicar of Lombardy, the King of Naples, the Duke of Calabria, Bentivoglio of Bologna, the Duke of Ferrara, and the Republics of Venice and Genoa, plied the Consistory. The Pope put them off, and for weeks, for months, the struggle ebbed and flowed. He listened, impressed, to the great praises of the Prior — " he must be," he murmured, meditatively pulling his ear, " a great saint." But he listened too to the Lombards, who described the whole thing as a machination of ambition and pride. Glancing over the petition in which the Prior stressed the difficulty of reform ' with so many nations under one roof,' he was less moved by the question of

reform, of which he knew little, than of administration, of which he knew much. The Lombards insisted upon that side; and with their numbers and weight, they gradually gained ground. They circulated a rumor that the separation was opposed in San Marco itself; whereupon the Prior forwarded to Rome a denial, unanimously subscribed by his flock. But the battle seemed lost. Fra Domenico, whom he had sent to Rome and who was utterly lost in that alien atmosphere, wrote home disheartened reports. " Never fear," his master replied. " Be steadfast, and you shall have the victory, though all the world were against us. The Lord scatters the counsels of men and casts down the designs of princes." Prayers were offered four times a day in San Marco. Nevertheless, the enemy was so sure of the outcome that Savonarola was summoned to Lombardy; but the letter, delayed on the way, reached him too late.

Convinced that only a miracle would persuade the Pope of the anti-Lombard sentiments of the Lord, Fra Domenico proposed to exhume and resuscitate a corpse. Before he could execute this design, however, someone else had been inspired — Cardinal Caraffa. The Consistory was over; nothing was settled; the Pope was tired. It was time for a *coup de maître.* The Cardinal accordingly took the situation into his own hands. Following the Pope into his study, he engaged him in desultory conversation; then, drawing from his bosom a

Brief authorizing the separation, he laid it on the table and invited him to sign. The Pope smiled and shook his head; the Cardinal smiled and seized his hand. Drawing the seal-ring from it — and still smiling — he stamped the document. It was a well-timed stroke. Fifteen minutes later, the Lombards were in the room, while Fra Domenico was marching off with the coveted prize. "If you had come a quarter of an hour sooner," said His Holiness, "you would have been satisfied; but now what is done is done."

## II

INVESTED with a new authority as the head of an autonomous congregation, and unhampered by outside influences, Savonarola at once undertook a drastic program of reform. A fierce energy swept through the convent, re-organizing, re-trenching, repressing, regenerating. The maledictions of St. Dominic, painted on the walls of San Marco — "my curse on him that shall bring possessions into this Order" — took on a terrible reality. Poverty was literally practised. The victuals were stinted, the vestments skimped. The reformed Dominicans were known by their robes. Shortened and narrowed, hugging the shoulders and barely draping the knee, they resembled a sack; and with their shrunken hoods, their small scapulars, and their patched sandals, the famished friars presented the woeful appearance of

orphans who have outgrown their clothes. Nor could they call even their robes their own; like their books, like their cells, they were periodically exchanged: the very necessaries of life became loans, whose ceaseless circulation was a perpetual reminder of the transitoriness of existence. The war on property was a war on personal identity, disintegrating and obliterating the individual in favor of the community; San Marco, in fact, became a cell of pure communism. The possessions of the convent were sold, and the community was reduced to work for its living. In this, however, a system of specialization was introduced. When the great housecleaning was over, every man had found his place, and one half of the hive supported the other by manual labor. Those who plied trades or were gifted in the arts — painting, sculpture, calligraphy, and the illumination of manuscripts — contributed their earnings to the support of the community, leaving the others free to devote themselves to the spirit. Among the brainworkers a further distinction was observed. To the mediocre were assigned the cases of conscience and the exposition of Scripture, while preaching and the higher studies were reserved for a small group of the elect. These were exempted from choir-duties and confession, and when they went forth to preach, they were accompanied by a lay-brother, whose duty it was to support them by the work of his hands; for only so, said the Prior, could they preach without fear or favor. " If

they tell everyone the truth, they will receive no alms, truth being everywhere detested; and hence they will desist from truth and be as mute dogs." To them fell the higher studies — theology, philosophy, moral science, Greek — which were pursued not to encourage but to combat their repute in the world — and the Oriental tongues, Hebrew, Turkish, and Chaldee, on which the Prior placed an especial stress, as a preparation for proselytizing among the heathen. The burden of drudgery fell on the novices and lay-brothers; but they were not selected, as might be expected, from the laboring classes. Manners were an essential element in the homogeneity of the flock, and the Prior favored the well-born because, " being prudent, kindly, exemplary, and clean, they treat the servants of God with gentleness and civility." Communism in San Marco was not inconsistent with a highly developed system of privilege.

The reform was not carried through without resistance. The elderly, the tepid, the conservative, formed a clique which, though eventually suppressed, continued its peevish and underhand opposition for years. Even the zeal of the ardent hindered its success. Intemperate abstinences and over-exertion told on their health; " many," we are told, " fell sick and could hardly keep on their feet; especially the younger, so that the rule had to be re-corrected." In their first struggles to scale the heights diabolical temptations were frequent. The convent was a prey to a plague of devils; they left a

strong odor; and night after night the Prior combated them, aspersing the cells with Holy Water and hymning the air indefatigably. To carry through the reform, he had created an impetus of enthusiasm, holding out hopes which many considered mirific — hopes that ' an effusion of the Holy Ghost would come upon them, and in such abundance that they would be amazed; they would be a perfect Congregation; men would come to them, dumbfounded, from every religion; laymen of great credit and mind; and it would be the most perfect of all religions.' To some it seemed that ' the great results they anticipated did not correspond to such unlimited promises,' and they lost heart. But they were impatient; the Prior was right. " When I founded our rule," he said, " in concert with my brothers, many complained of our small number. I told them that we would yet see the words of the prophet Isaiah realized: — Lord, our dwelling is too narrow: enlarge it that we may inhabit it. Well, those words have been realized. Every day I am told that we can no longer lodge our flock. We were barely seventy; we are now over two hundred." A tunnel had to be dug under the street to connect San Marco with the outlying buildings in which the overflow was quartered. This great influx was of practical value, bringing as it did recruits to the class on which the economic independence of the convent depended. For it was long before San Marco was self-supporting: the community saw some hard days. At the

beginning indeed it was forced to fall back upon charity, and laymen canvassed the city, collecting alms from door to door. But it weathered them, as it grew. The converts included some of the noblest names in the city — the Medici, the Gondi, the Salviati, the Strozzi, the Rucellai — and some of the most learned — Pietro Paolo d'Urbino, a professor of medicine in the University, Matias Blemet, an illustrious Israelite and Mirandola's master of Hebrew, while Pico himself was only prevented by death from joining the Order and Marsilio Ficino hovered uncertainly on the brink. San Marco had always been *par excellence* the upper class convent of Florence, and there was something handsome and strenuous in the new rule which appealed to the aristocratic temper. The ideals of plain living and high thinking were deeply rooted in Florentine character; under all its superficial frivolity there was a solid substratum which survived from Dante's day. Severity and simplicity still colored its esthetic ideals, and their moral counterpart appealed to the native mind.

The reform spread rapidly but it retained a local character. Several Tuscan convents joined the new Congregation — San Domenico di Fiesole, San Domenico di Prato, another in Bibbiena, two hospitals in Lecce and Pian di Mugnone; while a Camaldolese monastery offered to change its Order and unite with San Marco — an offer which the Prior was forced to refuse, as it

exceeded his authority to grant. Encouraged by this response, he pushed on to Pisa and Siena to propagate the good work. But there, on the periphery of his pasture, he met with apathy and rebuff. In Pisa he made but four converts; in Siena he was the cause of a riot and was expelled from the city. Regional feeling was insurmountable; he was circumscribed to his province. But he was undismayed; where he could not go, his message went for him. It spoke for itself, and yet — such was the malice of the world — it was often misunderstood and taxed with pretention and pride; and he was forced to explain its novelty. To a bewildered Abbess in Ferrara he wrote: "What are we doing? We are rejecting superfluities, returning to poverty and simplicity, to the original rule of our Order." Novelty? "What is a novelty is to see Mendicants building sumptuous palaces. If I could speak with you, I should convince you that the world is utterly in darkness, utterly depraved, and that it is time to regenerate the race of God. It is time, it is time, it is time, my beloved Mother! The Lord is weary, and we must despise the judgement of the lukewarm; we must prepare for the persecutions inevitable on every good work. And we are prepared! "

In the happy pugnacity of that flash ran the accent of a thoroughly contented man. His discontents had at last been transformed into action; he had found his function in life; and though his labors were heavy, his

heart was light. He was now the leader of a movement which had grown so swiftly from its modest beginnings, that he set no limits to his dream. With San Marco as a center, he saw it expanding in ever-widening circles — Florence, Rome, Italy, the Infidel — and his being moved in elated amplitude. An empire of souls, an invisible dominion of men — what temporal glory could compare with his mission? To lead that crusade, he said later, 'seemed to him greater than to be Pope; a man without merit may be Pope; but to conduct such a movement required a man of excellent virtue.' Of all forms of vanity, the pride of character is the subtlest and the most intoxicating. The ambition of the moralist — holy, impersonal, disinterested — is yet self-assertion; it is indeed its quintessence, its rarefied elixir, working in no material form but in very man to impose his ideals, his passion, himself — to coin his image in centuplicate on his fellows. For Savonarola it spelled the debouch of his whole life: a supreme retaliation on the world which had rejected him.

Fortified with his practical progress, he returned to the pulpit with renewed vigor, preaching the doctrine of works, scoring the ceremonial idolatry of the Church and its spiritual faithlessness, and brandishing the sword of prophecy with a more confident grasp. "Go to Rome," he cried "and throughout Christendom: in the houses of the great prelates and the grand masters you hear nothing but poetry and oratorical art. Go, I say,

go and see: you will find them reading their Humanities, damning themselves attempting to direct souls with Virgil, Horace, and Cicero. With Plato and Aristotle and Virgil and Petrarch, they solicit the ear and neglect the soul. Why, instead of so many books, do they not expound one? the one that contains the law of life? The Bible, O Christians, we should bear the Bible with us incessantly: not the book but the spirit. Piety lies deeper than paper. The true Books of Christ are His Saints and Apostles; true learning lies in imitating their lives. But to-day men are become Books of the Devil. They decry ambition and pride, and they are up to their eyes in it themselves; they preach chastity and they keep concubines; they command others to fast and live splendidly themselves. . . These prelates extol their dignities; they wish to be feared and revered; they covet the first seats in the synagogue, the first pulpits in Italy. They seek to be seen in the morning on the streets and greeted and called masters and rabbi. Good things seem to them evil, true false, sweet bitter, and vice-versa. The healing of souls is no longer their care, but their revenues: preachers preach to please princes, to be praised and magnified. . . This is the modern Church, no longer built of living stones, that is, of Christians strong in the quick faith, shapen by piety, but of wormwood, that is, of Christians prepared for the fires of Hell. . . Only one thing delights us in this temple, and that is that it is all painted and beautified.

*Charles VIII of France*

On the outside our Church has many beautiful ceremonies to solemnize its ecclesiastical offices, with rich vestments, with multitudinous banners, with candlesticks of silver and gold, with vessels so many that it is a marvel to behold. You see those great prelates with their beautiful mitres of gold and gems, their beautiful chasubles, their dalmatics of brocade, intoning their beautiful Vespers, their beautiful Masses, softly, so softly, with so many organs and singers, so many and such wonderful ceremonies, that you are amazed; and you take them for men of great gravity and sanctity, never doubting they can err; you believe what they preach, like Holy Writ; you say that the Church of Christ Jesus was never so flourishing, that the divine cult was never so well exercized as to-day, and that the first priests were a poor thing compared to our own. . . True, they did not have so many mitres and vessels of gold, for those they did have they gave away to the poor; whereas our priests, to make themselves vessels, rob the poor of their substance, without which they can not exist. But do you know what I say? In the primitive Church the vessels were of wood and the priests of gold; to-day the vessels are of gold and the priests of wood."

Florence began to respond to his call. While converts flowed into San Marco, able-bodied women, abandoning their families, flocked to the nunneries in such numbers that a visitor exclaimed at the transformation of the city: "you see nothing but boys, men, and old

crones on the streets." The reasons for this movement were various. If it is true that a religious revival thrives in an unsettled atmosphere, the condition was rapidly developing in Florence. An economic depression, following on the over-expansion of Lorenzo's heyday, created widespread distress: the political horizon was dark. The threat of a French invasion, which had hung over the peninsula for years, had suddenly grown active again. Charles VIII, at the head of the most formidable army in Europe, was openly preparing to assert the Angevin claim to Naples. In January, 1494, Ferrante of Naples died; in March Charles proclaimed himself sovereign of the Two Kingdoms; and in July he sent ambassadors to Florence and Rome, to negotiate for passage through their states. The apprehension of years suddenly took shape. Florence was traditionally friendly to the French, whose markets it dominated; but the cordial commercial relations of years had been overclouded by Piero de' Medici, who had antagonized both Charles and Ludovico of Milan, who was instigating the invasion. This mistake, added to his personal unpopularity and the disfavor that invariably rests upon rulers in times of economic distress, had produced an unstable political situation in Florence. It was the psychological moment for a religious revival.

Savonarola felt it. Declaiming against ' evil princes who are sent to punish the sins of their subjects,' he compared their cities to Babylon, ' the city which the

Lord would destroy.' The impious 'rush into the sea and leap upon a whale, which they mistake for a reef, and found themselves there. What are you doing? I cry. You burden the beast overmuch; you will drown. — But they struggle and discuss and fortify and quarrel, and one seeks to overcome the other, and finally a tyrant arises who oppresses them all. The whale, weary at last of so much noise, stirs, and they drown, and the city of Babylon is destroyed.'

The anarchy of Italy gave vivid point to the allegory, and in that unsettled atmosphere even his prophecies took on a new color. Against the brilliant noon they were phantoms; under a darkening sky they shone in eerie verisimilitude. The growing alarm of the public reenforced his power. For years he had foretold the coming of a new Cyrus, sent to castigate Italy for her sins, and when he alluded now to the approach of 'a great scourge,' men swallowed hard. Apocalyptic terrors were no longer a metaphor; the halcyon days were over; the war-clouds were gathering; beyond the Alps a cataclysm was preparing; in the northern heavens a sword gleamed; and its rattle echoed dismally down the peninsula in the lugubrious periods of the preacher of doom.

Thus on all sides reality responded to his visions. As the shadow of the ultramontane storm approached, he resumed a text he had broached as far back as 1492. In the Lent of that year, expounding the Flood, he had

built a symbolic Ark upon the completion of which, on Easter Day, he cried: 'Let every man make haste to enter the Ark of the Lord: to-day Noah bids every man enter, the door stands open; but a time will come when the Ark will be closed, and many will repent in vain.' The metaphor of March, 1492, was a reality in November, 1494. The Flood had come; the French were at the gates. On the 17th of that month he preached in the Duomo to a dense congregation; and when the terrible words rolled forth, '*Lo, I unloose the waters,*' Pico della Mirandola, who was present, declared that his hair stood on end. When the sermon was over, the speechless congregation dispersed, 'more dead than alive,' a contemporary tells us. A preternatural hush settled over the voluble city; and in that silence a reverberating cry rose: 'Repent!'

V

# *The French Invasion*

## I

CHARLES VIII crossed the life of Savonarola to affect it decisively. Like a wandering planet, he swam into his stars for a moment and passed on; but that glancing contact gave a propulsion of incalculable import to his career. With the upheavals produced by the passage of the French, a new world opened in which he was called to play an active part; and the long process of his development from rhetoric to reality was then completed. That he should have owed this result to a person so impractical as Charles was at once paradoxical and proper: an affinity existed between them. Both were visionaries obsessed by obsolete ideals; and their common futility seemed to draw them together by an innate fitness, a superior logic.

Charles was a visionary, not because he was impotent, but because he was powerful. The long struggle to weld France into a nation had culminated, under his



PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

father, Louis XI, in the triumph of the monarchy over feudal anarchy; the consolidation of the Crown was completed in the regency of Anne de Beaujeu; and when her brother came to manhood, he inherited a position of security and stability such as his ancestors had never known. His first impulse was to spend his inheritance. Its visible symbol was a standing army, the first in Europe; and standing armies are rarely capable of standing. His legions were restless, he was ambitious; the instrument lay to his hand and tempted him. But his ambitions took a peculiar form, owing to the fact that he was deformed. Sickly and undersized, with a head too large and legs too weak for his body, he atoned for his puny size by the towering stature of his dreams; the pigmy had the ambitions of a Paladin. Bred on books of piety and the fables of chivalry, he dreamed of emulating the glory of Louis the Saint and Charles the Great by a Crusade. This obsolete ideal found little favor in France; but Charles, young, romantic, feeble-minded, malformed, with an army at his beck and generations of thwarted kings in his blood, was not amenable to reason. Closely connected with this ideal was another. The lure of the South fascinated him even as a child; at the age of eight he sent for pictures of Rome; and he grew up, nursing the hope of an Italian expedition. His level-headed sister combated it; but his favorites, an ex-valet, the Seneschal de Vesc, and a *parvenu* merchant, Cardinal Briçonnet, to assure

their ascendancy, no less steadily encouraged him. Thus, in both his ambitions, he had the sober elements of the country against him; while all the irresponsibles — the intriguers and the footloose feudal adventurers — urged him on. Vacillating as they were high-flown, his dreams might never have materialized, however, had they not suited the purposes of Ludovico Maria Sforza of Milan.

Those purposes were neither chivalric nor visionary. The Regent of Milan had designs on the Duchy; he had already confined his nephew, Gian Galeazzo, to the Castle of Pavia; and in preparation for the final coup, he called in the French to cover him. His main fear was Naples — the wife of Gian Galeazzo was a Neapolitan princess — and Naples, he pointed out, would prove an excellent base for a Crusade. The Italians protested; but he reconciled his interests to his patriotism. In its final development, the invasion was a trap for the French; they would find him, at the foot of the Alps, on their entrance a host and at their exit a jailer — a reversal of roles from which he proposed to emerge, with the help of an Italian League, as the saviour and leader of the peninsula. The patriotic conclusion proved his political genius: the scheme was simple, bold, and comprehensive: there was something in it for everyone — for the French, for himself, for his allies — for everyone except, of course, Naples.

There was even something in it for an evangelist. To Savonarola the invasion was a providential calamity. Charles was the answer to all his prayers. The promise of a Crusade would alone have won his heart, for it was his ultimate ambition to launch one; the castigation of Italy was a god-send, and he hailed him as the minister of Divine Providence. But what finally fascinated him was the hope of ecclesiastical reform. In August, 1494, a French envoy reached the Vatican to prevent a pending alliance between the Pope and Naples. He arrived too late, and the Pope refused to receive him. The rebuff enraged Charles and a council was called in which ' many things,' it was said, ' were proposed against the Pope and for the reform of the Church.' No more was needed to fire Savonarola. Might and right — their combination in the person of Charles was a prodigy devoutly to be acclaimed; he idealized him with all the frustrated energy of his nature, re-created him in his own image, and invested him with his own mission. The discrepancies between the real and the ideal were to cost him some cruel deceptions; but they too were part of the service Charles rendered him. As yet no misgivings clouded his faith; and as the invasion drew near, he hailed it with confident forebodings. " Lo, the sword of the Lord is come, the prophecies verified, the scourging begun: the Lord leads these armies. O Florence, the time of singing and dancing is over; the hour is come to weep your sins with

torrents of tears. Your sins, O Florence; your sins, O Rome; your sins, O Italy, are the cause of these flails. Repent, pray, unite! "

## II

Terror was, however, not the only feeling which the invasion inspired. The menace had hung over the peninsula so long, the preparations were so dilatory, that the victims had grown complacent and even sceptical. At various times in the past, one or another Italian prince had threatened to call in the French for his own ends; but in the end prudence had always recalled him to patriotism. Moreover, the expedition was aimed only against Naples; and national sentiment, among the factious city-states of Italy, was too weak to see that it represented a danger to all of them. Alexander VI was almost alone in realizing it and his resistance came close to costing him the tiara. In the spring and summer of 1494, however, the menace began to take shape, and a wave of alarm spread through the peninsula. The fame of the French army paralyzed all thought of resistance. Variously estimated at forty to ninety thousand strong, rigidly disciplined, and equipped with the latest artillery, it was the most formidable war-machine in Europe; and it made war in professional earnest, war without quarter, a war of ultramontane

atrocity which appalled the Italians, accustomed to the polite engagements of their mercenary militia. Nor was it only the armaments they lacked, it was the national spirit; a congeries of factious States, they were incapable, save in a momentary emergency, of union. It was neither of resistance nor of union that they thought; it was of negotiating, individually, for neutrality. The alarm subsided, however, when it was realized that Charles was as apprehensive as they. He was proceeding very slowly, feeling his way, sounding out the temper of his enemies, and taking the temperature of adventure with a cautious finger. Immediately, another reversal of feeling took place. As the invaders drew back, the victims came to desire the calamity. Charles was solicited by all those who had an axe to grind and who counted on him to wield it; and plotters and expatriates poured into France to propel the invasion over the border.

The material difficulties were great; and as they accumulated, Charles began to lose heart. The enterprise was unpopular in France, requiring as it did an enormous outlay of money for a very small and problematical result. The question of money laid on it a leaden curse. Ludovico paid over 200,000 florins; Charles pawned the Crown jewels and those of his friends; he borrowed, at an exorbitant rate of interest, from a Genoese bank — he all but raised a subscription in Italy; and still the money melted away. The measures

which he took for the protection of the realm in his absence were even more unpopular: he negotiated treaties with Spain and Austria, sealed by the cession of French territories. Deeper and deeper he blundered into errors and debts until the enterprise became an incubus, and men asked themselves what profit it could bring. Again and again, he was ready to abandon it, and up to the last moment he was not expected to accompany it. Finally, on August 22, 1492, the expedition started; he slipped away quietly and joined it — but only to countermand it. Again, the delays set in. Ludovico forwarded an additional fifty thousand florins; and it rumbled slowly on. On September 7, he reached Asti — after stopping at Turin to borrow the jewels of his aunt, Madame de Savoie, which he pawned for 12,000 ducats, and at Casale, to borrow those of the Marchioness de Montferrat, which he mortgaged for an equal sum. His first impression of Italy was disappointing. 'The wines,' it seems, 'were sour that year and not at all pleasing to the French, no more than the excessive heat of the atmosphere.' It was only with the utmost difficulty that Ludovico persuaded him to proceed to Annone, in the suburbs of Milan. Ludovico was himself unpleasantly surprised when his ally arrived with only two hundred men, for the main body of the army, routed through Genoa, was at that moment dancing at sea. This left him exposed to a Neapolitan army on his flank, with but five hundred men of his own to

check it, and knowing that if it attacked, the French, as Commynes confessed, ' would have left him to shift for himself.' But, as the same historian adds, ' God conducted the enterprise.' The invincible legions met the Neapolitan fleet at sea, scattered it, raked the shore with a brisk cannonade, and, landing at Rapallo, massacred the inhabitants. A thrill of terror ran through the peninsula, and the field was cleared. The Neapolitan army faded from sight.

The invasion, indeed, was not a military campaign; it was determined at every juncture by fluctuations of feeling — fear, hope, courage, doubt — by the mercurial phantoms of the mind. With everything in his favor, Charles now began to repine, and Ludovico had to breathe spirit into him. ' Sire,' he perorated, ' never fear for the success of this enterprise. Italy consists of but three powers in any way considerable. One of them — Milan — is already yours; Venice is neutral; you have only to deal with Naples. If you will be ruled by me, I will make you greater than Charlemagne; for, when you have conquered Naples, we will easily drive the Turk out of Constantinople.' But Charles had developed an inexplicable suspicion of his host. He moved, but cautiously. He refused to enter Milan; and when he reached Pavia he slept in the Castle under doubled guards. There he had a distressing experience. Under the same roof lay Gian Galeazzo, who was his cousin; his wife threw herself at his feet and implored his aid

against Ludovico. This appeal to his chivalry was the first note of romance in the whole wretched business, and it put him in a painful position; he could do nothing; and so he promptly packed and moved on. In Piacenza he learned that his cousin was dead, and Ludovico, who was suspected of being no stranger to his sudden demise, hurried back to Milan for his coronation.

Autumn had set in, and it rained incessantly. The season was cheerless on the bleak slopes of the Apennines. ' The whole army, understanding how ill they were provided with everything necessary for such an expedition, had a great mind to return home: those that were the chief promoters of it being now the first to condemn it.' Charles shared their feeling. He was ill provided — with money — with spirit — with everything. His courage, his confidence, his chivalry, were rapidly disintegrating; he was no greater in his own esteem than he was. That is a state of mind which no man can long endure. He was desperately in need of the reviving breath of romance.

Before him lay Florence, which had not yet declared for him. He was urged by two cousins of Piero de' Medici, who were working for his overthrow, to seize the border fortresses and penetrate into Florentine territory. The whole district, they assured him, was seething with revolt, and at his appearance Pisa and Lucca would throw off the Florentine yoke and hail him as

their deliverer. His courage revived, but he took the precaution of requesting a safe-conduct through Florentine territories. The reply was evasive; he pushed on. Sarzana, the key-fortress, offered a stubborn resistance; it lay in mountainous, snow-covered ground; and after three days, he left a small force to invest it and proceeded to Pisa where, as he had been promised, he was welcomed as a Liberator. Ludovico, ever on the alert to please him, arranged a popular demonstration in his honor. As he was on his way to Mass, a crowd pressed about him with cries of *Liberty*. 'The King,' says Commynes, 'not understanding what they meant by that word and beginning to commiserate the sufferings which the poor subjects of both princes and commonwealths endured, replied he was willing it should be so.' This raised a delicate question of ethics, for the safe-conduct had finally been sent and the French were officially guests of the Florentine Government; 'the town,' as Commynes put it plainly, 'was not his own and he was received into it only in friendship and to relieve him of his great necessities.' But the appeal to his chivalry was irresistible. Thereupon 'the people began to fill the streets with shouts of joy; and running to the bridge on the river Arno, they pulled down a great lion, called Marzocco, which stood on a pillar and represented the Florentine Government, and cast it into the river.' Then they set up 'a statue of the French King on the pillar, with his sword in his hand, and the lion under his horse's

feet.' The meaning of Liberty began to clarify in his mind.

For Ludovico, however, liberty meant something else again. He thoroughly approved of the emancipation of Pisa from Florence; he encouraged the popular demonstration which moved Charles to guarantee it; and then he dug down into his purse and offered him thirty thousand florins for Pisa and the fortresses. Charles accepted the money; but he did not betray his trust. Ludovico claimed and pleaded in vain; the king remained adamant, like his statue, standing with drawn sword on his pedestal, the champion of Liberty as he understood it.

## III

But he understood it very imperfectly as yet, and he was soon to be further enlightened. Meanwhile, up the river, the cry of Liberty had been raised, and in Florence his approach precipitated a revolution.

The incompetence of Piero de' Medici reached its climax in this crisis. Piero the Unfortunate, as History has called him, was an average young man of ordinary intelligence, wholly unfitted for the responsibilities of that precarious tyranny by popular consent which the Medici had created in Florence. A magnificent athlete, he was in his element, playing ball in the streets; but a football player in politics was a politician of the feet. In the long preliminary months preceding the invasion,

he drifted toward the catastrophe, making only feeble or unfortunate attempts to avert it. There was ample time to negotiate for the neutrality of Florence, which was all that Charles required or the city desired; but he drifted with incurable improvidence. As he had personally antagonized Charles, his factor in France found it impossible to reach the king, and from his entourage he learned that the royal plans were so uncertain, that he allowed himself to be lulled into a false security. Intermittently he awoke, only to make matters worse. He declared his sympathy for Naples, without the means or the will to give it effect; and at the same time he sent an embassy to France which ruined him. It was headed by Piero Capponi, a supporter of his house, who had been alienated by his errors and who employed his mission to undermine his master. He recommended to Charles the expulsion of Florentine traders from France; and the reaction in Florence heightened Piero's unpopularity. His power was already tottering when the French appeared on his borders; and his conduct in the crisis gave it the death-blow.

Even at this juncture everything might have been saved by according the safe-conduct which Charles requested through Florentine territory. When the Government returned an evasive answer, the French envoys left in anger and the king swore to sack the city. Then the city awoke. The safe-conduct was granted, but it was too late; the French were already in Florentine ter-

FRANCESCO GRANACCI

*Entrance of Charles VIII into Florence*

ritory. Piero hurried to Pontremoli to repair his errors. Never was the fact more completely demonstrated that the invasion was not a military but a psychological campaign than in what followed. Paralyzed with fear, Piero not only signed over, with obsequious eagerness, Pisa and the fortresses, including Sarzana which was still holding out, but he made, unbidden, several concessions which the French had 'scarce the confidence to demand.' Indeed, they 'spoke with laughter and smiles of his condescensions and were so amazed by them' that they sent to Florence to learn 'whether in truth he had been given this commission,' and to obtain its ratification by the Government. It was refused, and in the council which followed Capponi raised the cry of revolt: "It is time to have done with this government of children." A new delegation was sent to the king with instructions, if it met Piero, not to salute him. The revolution had begun.

Capponi was a warm admirer of Savonarola and he recommended that his eloquence be employed to mollify the king. Accordingly, an invitation was extended to the Prior of San Marco to accompany the envoys. He hesitated, as well he might. With this first flattering recognition of his influence, the wild and whirling words he had cast to the winds returned to roost, freighted with an enormous responsibility. He was called upon to cope with the realization of his prophecies, to disarm the scourge with the same rhetoric with which he had

invoked it, to conquer the world anew with his eloquence. But he did not hesitate long; it was his Christian duty to go; and after consulting with his brothers, he consented. He accepted with Christian humility, which he carried so far that he insisted on making the journey afoot; but when it was represented to him that he would arrive too late to be of service, he compromised on a mule.

There was, however, very little that either he or the envoys could do. Florence was at the mercy of the French; and the commission could only appeal for an amicable occupation. Charles refused to discuss the question until he was safely lodged within the walls. "In the great city . . . in the great city," he repeated in his halting Italian, "in the great city we will settle everything." It only remained to propitiate his spirit; this was the Friar's opportunity: and he rose to it. He stood at last face to face with his ideal. His first impression was overpowering: the Frenchman reeked with perfume. But this cloying, sickly-sweet odor was the only violent thing about him. The face was vacant and kindly; and in its haggard configuration the eyes, moonstruck and blue, glowed with lunar candor, like an owl's. He gazed on the planetary countenance, sallow under its aura of red hair, like a comet's, and saw a man malleable to his influence. The lips hung open, and the royal jaw dropped as, drawing himself up, he laid his mission on the little man with an impressive allocution. "Most

Christian King," he said, " you are an instrument in the hands of the Lord, who sends you to relieve the afflictions of Italy, as I have for several years predicted, and to reform the Church, which lies prostrate in the dust. But if you are not just and merciful; if you fail to respect Florence, its women, its citizens, and its freedom; if you forget the mission on which God sends you, He will choose another to fulfill it; He will harden His Hand and chastise you with terrible afflictions. These things I say to you from the Lord." One feature of Destiny the king had: he was inscrutable; and the mission returned to Florence, still unenlightened as to his intentions.

Meanwhile, Piero had hastened home to check the incipient revolt. The city was calm with a vague surly silence, which he mistook. On the night of his arrival, he appeared at a window of his palace, addressed a little knot of bystanders, assuring them that all was well, and scattered confetti; but the confetti fell like funereal flowers and lay soiling on the street. He noticed nothing and, ordering wine to be distributed to the crowd, retired in the best of spirits. The next day was Sunday and he slept late. In the afternoon he rode, with some few men, to the Palazzo Vecchio to square his accounts with the Signoria. He was admitted, but alone, and he was advised to disband his men; whereupon, irresolute and irritated, he withdrew. An hour later, he reappeared with more retainers; but the doors were shut in his

face. A crowd collected; the children whistled and threw stones; but it contented itself with jostling him and shooing him with the flaps of its bonnets. Flushed and uncertain, he drew his sword, hesitated, and turned tail. As he rode, he heard, through the mild chimes, the lowing of *La Vacca,* the communal bell. The slow boom of that guttural gong, reverberating through the November twilight like something lethargic and submerged, stirred unsounded memories, and the streets began to fill with old wraiths — hoary veterans in outmoded clothes, brandishing antiquated weapons, and propagating an obsolete cry: *Liberty!* Into that gathering multitude rode a returning envoy from Pisa, Francesco Valori, who inflamed it with a rehearsal of Piero's pusillanimities. In the Corso it crossed the Cardinal Giovanni, who loudly disclaimed his brother and joined the cry of *Popolo e Liberta!;* but he was hooted as a turncoat and routed with the flat of a pike. When the mob reached the Medici Palace, it saw the Cardinal in a window, his ears pink with prayer, his hands upraised, but it did not molest him, as he was regarded as ' a good lad and of upright character.' Meanwhile, Piero was clattering through the popular quarters, scattering gold in a vain attempt to rally support; panic overtook him. At the gates, re-enforcements awaited him, but he rode on without drawing rein — on into oblivion. The crowd began to pillage and scatter. The Cardinal slipped away to San Marco, deposited his valuables, borrowed a

Dominican robe and clattered out of town on a mule — to his future, the Papacy. The revolution was over; in four hours the lifework of three generations of Medici had been annihilated.

## IV

Unique in Florentine annals, the revolution was bloodless. This was due, in part, to the fact that no resistance was offered and that the unpopularity of Piero was the result, not of oppression but of incompetence; some were even willing to condone his mistakes on the ground of inexperience. " He acted like a young fellow," wrote Landucci, " and perhaps with good results, since we remained friends with the king, thank God! " But other factors also determined its peaceful outcome. The French were pouring into the city; detachments arrived daily, chalking up their billets, and slowly submerging the town with armed men. Their behavior was exemplary, but the danger of an explosion, in conditions so unsettled and inflammatory, was acute. On the day of the riot, some strolling Gascons, welcoming a little excitement on a Sunday afternoon, paraded in Piero's behalf; but the Signoria issued a proclamation, ordering all foreigners to lay down their arms, and they were reminded by the rioters themselves that this was ' a matter between citizens only.' They had the good sense to obey. Two days later a rumor rose that Piero was

approaching with troops. In an instant, the city sprang to arms; the towers teemed with people; the Piazza resounded to deafening cries of *Popolo e Liberta!;* and from the bowels of the town, from cellars and convents and back-shops, poured a hidden host. The rumor proved false, but this instantaneous mobilization impressed the French, already uneasy in the labyrinth of narrow lanes overhung with frowning battlements, of Florence: and their relations with the inhabitants remained circumspect.

But there was a third influence at work and by no means the least. On the day of Piero's flight, Savonarola was absent from the city, but both before and after it he appeared in the pulpit, preaching peace, union, and forbearance incessantly. For him the crisis was a deliverance in more senses than one. It was a release, above all, from that tone of intimidation, dictated by his impotence, with which he was identified in the pulpit. Now, in the hour of reality, he laid it aside, like a mask which has served its purpose, magnifying and sublimating but also distorting and concealing the real man; and it was the man the privileged knew in his privacy who appeared in the pulpit, appeasing, appealing, pacifying, sublimated by his own humanity. " The Lord has heard your prayers," he said, " He has brought about a great revolution without bloodshed. Persevere, people of Florence, in your good works; persevere in peace. If you wish the Lord to persevere in mercy, be

merciful toward your brothers, your friends, your foes; otherwise you will suffer the scourge prepared for the rest of Italy. *Misericordiam volo,* cries the Lord. Woe to who neglects His commands! " It was inevitable, perhaps, that something of the old comminatory tone should still cling even to his appeals, that the preacher, caught in the weaving complexities of the crisis, should feel that he dominated it — or rather that he must dominate it; and the very precariousness of that peace required the ring of authority. *Misericordiam volo!* But it was the vigor of paternal solicitude. " People, I have been as a father to you; I have toiled all the time of my life to make you realize the truth of the faith and the good life, and I have had nothing but tribulations, mockery and shame for my pains. If at least I might have the solace of seeing you bring forth good works! O my people, what have I ever desired save to see you secure and united? Unite, pray, repent, and give alms! " The attitude of the public toward him underwent a change: a sympathy sprang up between them, spontaneous and human, and when Capponi recommended him for the mission to the French King, he could say with truth that ' Father Savonarola has now the full love of the people.' The mission heightened his popularity, and when he returned from it, though nothing in reality had been accomplished, he was regarded as a public benefactor. Weaving, weaving, the Fates plied their shuttles, spinning a delicate web of

circumstances which netted him in imperceptible entanglements, drawing him slowly out of the calm of the cloister into a broadening sphere of responsible activities. More and more, in the popular imagination, he made sun and rain; and before long he was called on again to serve and to save.

The terms, the length, the nature of the occupation were still undetermined, when Charles made his entrance into the city; and he made it as a conqueror, with lance on thigh. The investment was complete; the French, quartered in every house, overflowed into the suburbs and lay as far up the river as Dicomano. Under this flood of foreigners Florence was submerged, but it was not paralyzed. It was ready to rise at a moment's notice, and the fatal or successful issue of its occupation depended entirely on the good will of the inhabitants and the good behavior of the invaders. The news of the Pisan revolt was a shock; but it was offset by the freedom of Florence, for which Charles was also responsible. Preparations were made for his reception as an ally and a friend, in the hope that he would act like one. On the church-doors placards proclaimed him '*Rex, pax et restauratio libertatis*'; the balconies were hung with tapestries and his arms; and a triumphal chariot was built for his conveyance, emblazoned with a monster lily and studded with olive boughs and silver palms. The gates were widened for his entrance, the moat filled, and a portion of the walls dismantled; the streets were

strewn with herbs, platforms were raised for jugglers, musicians, and orators. All the paraphernalia of Carnival were rolled forth: the floats and rolling stages for the miracle-plays; the fiery pinwheels; and giants on stilts stalked through the streets, clapping their cardboard paws. In front of the Medici Palace, where he was to lie, two magnificent triumphal columns were erected, covered with intricate arabesques and bearing the arms of France; and those arms appeared everywhere, from the Communal Palace to the slums and the suburbs. After so festive an outlay, it was impossible to feel unfriendly toward the object of it; and in the crowd which gathered to greet him, enthusiasm was the dominant emotion, made more cordial, if anything, by a lingering thrill of fear. On the previous night, Charles lay at the villa of Capponi without the walls; and his host made an astute observation. "When once the Italians rub noses with the French, they will fear them less." And so it proved.

It was six o'clock in the evening when the king reached the gates; it was dark, it was raining; all that could be seen of him at first, as he advanced very slowly under a golden canopy through the dense multitude was a white hat, a voluminous azure cloak flowing over his black charger, and a golden arm holding his conquering lance on his thigh. The first impression was of a figure fit to command the legions tramping by; and in the mass they were awe-inspiring. An interminable procession of

large 'brusque' men, stalwart Swiss, strapping Germans, nimble Gascons, in bright tight uniforms which displayed their every part, rank after rank, in regular formation, swinging by, the far-famed army justified its reputation. Their size, their discipline, everything was redoubtable; their horses, with cropped ears and tails, were amazing; their massive cannon, their culverin, their fauconnets, drawn not by oxen but by horses, were overpowering; and their king was prodigious. On a nearer view, however, this impression was modified. He was seen to be very misshapen; and with his sallow face and set smile, he singularly suggested a dwarfish jester; but there was an air of kindliness and candor about him more winning than kingliness, and he was voted *simpatico*. The rain fell, and still he smiled; the orators, turning their silks inside out mumbled their addresses and ducked into doorways; and still he smiled; his horse fretted and champed; he smiled. When at last, after a progress of two hours, he dismounted in front of the Duomo, he was seen to be very small and weak on his legs; and then, as he moved through a double row of torches into the church, the cries of *Viva Francia* burst out, delirious and sincere — "such tumultuous shouting as never was heard," says an eyewitness, "everyone shouted, old and young, great and small, and all from their hearts without flattery." Charles had conquered Florence by his insignificance.

In that moment, the catastrophe turned to a carnival;

the city gave itself up to rejoicing. In the leers of the hobgoblin masks, the antics of the stilted *giganti,* the obscene squeal of the bagpipes, and the jackanape crews on the floats — the only Arks apt for the Flood — the city seemed to be caricaturing its fears and the grotesque guest who regarded himself as its conqueror. All the next days the enthusiasm continued. Charles was lavishly entertained, and he enjoyed everything. He visited the lions; he inspected the pen of the famous giraffe, now defunct, which had been the envy of kings and the darling of nuns; he examined the prisons and requested the release of the political prisoners, which was granted. His popularity redoubled.

But when the festivities were over, and the Government sat down to talk terms with him, the enthusiasm vanished. He was a hard customer and, as usual, he was in need of money. He demanded 120,000 florins, of which 50,000 were to be paid immediately and the remainder within six months, besides a yearly loan of 12,000 for the duration of his stay in Italy. As for Pisa and the fortresses, he insisted on holding them until he was safely out of the country. The terms were exorbitant, but they were met. Worse followed. Moved by the pleadings of Piero's wife, he proposed the restoration of the lawful ruler of Florence. Then the mask fell; the temper of the city changed overnight. He was in a position to enforce his demands; but he had stumbled on an incalculable factor which defied force. Little as he

understood Liberty when he entered Pisa, he understood it even less in Florence. The Government refused to entertain the idea 'on any condition whatsoever'; and if it came to a clash, they could call up 'fifty thousand men of their own.' The negotiations were broken off.

Then there set in a period of strain, of suspicion, of sudden panics. Nerves were on edge; the sight of anyone carrying stones or gravel 'drove men wild and they struck out.' The French grew overbearing; they patrolled the city, robbing, beating, and disarming the citizens; and at night, in dark alleys, there were retaliations. No one ventured abroad after the *Ave Maria,* and lights burned in the windows, by Government orders, till one in the morning. A week after his triumphal entry, the city had been transformed into an ambush; the carnival had turned to a catastrophe. The French themselves grew panicky. Suddenly they would flee to the gates and the bridges, and 'when they were asked the reason of it, no one knew.' Finally, the inevitable clash came. A band of French soldiers led a group of Italian prisoners through the streets for ransom; the outraged onlookers set them free; there was a riot; windows opened, stones rained, and only the prompt action of the Signoria prevented a general uprising. Several days later, a rumor rose that the French were preparing to sack the city. Shops shut, the houses were stocked with stones, arms, and food, and preparations were

made for a second Sicilian Vespers. Once more the Government had recourse to Savonarola. He hurried to the Medici Palace where, at first, he was refused entrance by the Barons; after two hours, he was finally admitted. The king rose to meet him — he was recognized. Agitating an ebony cross in his face, he urged him to abandon ' his impious and cruel design against the loyal and blameless Florentine people ' and not to touch ' what was not his own.' " It is enough that you have their hearts." Then he took him by the hand. " Your Majesty must know that it is the will of God that you leave this city without making any further changes, or you and your army will pay for it with your life." He pointed out that he was ' losing his time, forgetting the duty which God had laid upon him, to the grave detriment of his spiritual welfare and worldly glory.' " Heed the voice of God's servant. Proceed on your way without delay. Do not provoke the wrath of the Lord by the ruin of this city." The reply of the king has not transpired but the scene apparently impressed him. When the Government, supported by all the resident ambassadors, again approached him, no more was said of the Medici. On the question of money, however, he would not yield. A heated discussion followed, which culminated in his exasperated threat — ' We will sound out our trumpets ' — and Capponi's historic retort, as he tore up the treaty — ' And we will sound out our bells.' Outblustered, Charles yielded, and a compact was

signed, guaranteeing the return of Pisa and the fortresses on his return to France and supplying him with the stipulated indemnity, to which he took oath on the next day in the Duomo. He was offered, and accepted, the title of Protector of Florentine Liberties. Two days later, he rode out of Florence, his self-esteem fully recovered. The title pleased him; but as to the meaning of Liberty, he was once more in the dark. In that he was not alone; it was a problem which taxed stronger heads than his; and as Florence settled down to cope with it, it found it full of confusion.

## VI

# *Political Reforms*

### I

THE French invasion marked the turning-point in Savonarola's career. His efforts as a peace-maker throughout the crisis identified him in the public mind as a patriot; and though its successful issue was the result of many factors beside his intercession, it was so largely determined by moral elements that his influence had been of real public service. This was recognized by a remarkable tribute: he was invited to collaborate in the reorganization of the Government. The revolution, by a miracle, had been bloodless; his friends appealed to him to resume his spiritual leadership in the difficult period of reconstruction. He could not, in conscience, refuse; but he realized the consequences of consent. It meant a political career, with all its personal dangers, its practical problems, its questionable propriety for one of his profession; it meant forsaking forever all hope of freedom and peace; it meant embracing the struggles of men; it meant, in short, a return to life. It

meant perhaps death — for, from the first, he had a foreboding that martyrdom awaited him. But it meant also a brilliant opportunity to carry his life-work to its logical conclusion, to test the reforms he had begun in the convent on a national scale. The destinies of a people were in his hands to mould and direct. Politically, his opportunity was great — to nurse its liberties, to relieve need, to reconcile differences, to reform abuses, to regenerate justice, to instil his principles into the body politic; but political reform was but a means to a much greater end — moral reform. The power to penalize vice by law, to enact virtue by statute, was the consummation of all his day-dreams, the compensation of all his efforts; and for that prize he ventured.

"Your reform," he said in one of his first sermons, "must begin with the things of the spirit . . . and all your temporal gain must serve your moral and religious good, on which it depends. And if you have heard it said that *States are not ruled by paternosters,* remember that this is the precept of tyrants, of the enemies of God and the commonwealth, the rule for oppressing and not for freeing and uplifting the city. If you wish a good government, you must restore it to God. Certainly, I should not mix into politics, if this were not so." In a subsequent sermon, on the eve of the new elections, he startled his congregation by declaring that the Lord wished to give Florence a new head: "This new head," he cried, "Is Christ Jesus: He will be

your King! " There was a moment of stupefaction; then the acclaim, the hosannas, the huzzas, proclaimed Christ King of Florence and patron, after Charles, of its liberties.

Politically, his sympathies were with the Popular party and he became its spokesman in the pulpit. Its leaders encouraged his religious revival for its political value. It offered an outlet for those overheated party passions which usually vented themselves in bloodshed, in periods of political change; furthermore, with its spirit of discipline and its picturesque accessories — its charitable processions and puritan habits — it created among the members of the party a solid, sectarian feeling. And among the public at large the religious revival gained ground for a similar reason; its success was the tribute of a profoundly partial people to a man who had loyally lived his religion in their behalf. He was henceforth a comrade, identified with their trials and dangers, with their struggles and experiments; and they extended to him an unlimited credit.

This feeling of personal loyalty was increased by his prompt action on behalf of the needy, immediately after the departure of the French. His first thought was practical, his first appeal for alms and employment. Processions were formed and public collections taken, which brought in large returns; he proposed that the subsidies of the University of Pisa be devoted for a year to the poor, and that the church vessels be sold for the same

purpose, offering himself to take the lead in San Marco. "But above all," he urged, "make an ordinance to open the shops and give work to this people that stands idle in the streets." He induced the Government to name a commission for the remission of debts. These measures of evangelical charity made the religious revival immediately popular, and when he began his political campaign, he enjoyed already a messianic prestige. He approached his task with an overflowing heart. "O Florence," he exclaimed, "I can not tell you all that I feel in me. . . . Oh, if I could tell you all, you would see a vessel sealed and new, filled with fermenting must that finds no issue." A ferment of life surged up within him, an intoxicating energy of hope. To be useful — no longer to sign himself 'an unprofitable servant of the Lord,' *servus Ihesu Christi inutilis* — to put aside protest and intimidation and death and destruction for activity and comfort and life and construction: it was to be born anew. His lonely and ineffectual life had reached its turning-point; and he had rejoined humanity.

## II

After the departure of the French, a provisional government of twenty Electors was voted by popular acclamation, while a root-and-branch reform of the Constitution was studied. The 'tyranny' of the Medici, leaving the old Republican forms intact, had been exer-

cised by manipulating the ballot and filling the offices with their creatures. The foundation stone of the new order was, therefore, a popular assembly in which the appointment of the magistrates was vested. As a model for this body, Piero Soderini and his colleagues of the Popular Party proposed the Venetian Constitution, which enjoyed a prestige among political thinkers of the period comparable to that of the French Republic among libertarians of a later day. To it was ascribed the internal peace which the Republic, lounging on the tideless lagoons, had for generations enjoyed; and the model found general favor in Florence. It was over the details of its adaptation to Florentine habits that controversy arose; and as it embodied the popular sovereignty, the question of restricting it to an oligarchical form or enlarging it to a democratic one became at the outset of vital importance. Savonarola threw the full weight of his eloquence into the defense of the latter and appeared daily in the pulpit, expounding it to audiences of thirteen and fourteen thousand men. As the nature of his sermons changed, so did that of his congregations: women were excluded. They were excluded even from the charitable processions, to which they contributed. At his request, they remained within doors, though the doors were permitted to stand open; but they were sedulously relegated to the background. This new practical sphere of activity was a man's world, and to these political rallies he expounded his ideas not only by

emotional appeals but by reason, argument, and theory. Another side of his mind came into play; and though he still appealed to principle, he defended it by experience. He recommended the democratic principle, in fact, not on sentimental grounds but on those of expediency. Of the three systems of government, the absolute, the oligarchical, and the democratic, the first, he maintained, was the most ideal in theory, as it provided the maximum efficiency and union; but the effect of irresponsible power on the holder was invariably demoralizing. The second, being a system of privilege, fomented disorder, ambition, and faction, a condition to which Florence was notoriously prone; and in Florence, therefore, for the sake of union and peace it was necessary to satisfy the greatest number. He put the argument in a flattering form. " In the peoples of the North," he explained, " where there is much strength and little wit, and in the people of the South where, on the contrary, there is much wit and little strength, the rule of one man may sometimes be excellent. But in Italy, and above all in Florence, where strength and intellect abound, where wits are subtle and spirits restless, the rule of one man can only result in tyranny. The only system adapted to your needs is the civil and universal government. Woe to you, Florence, if you take a head who can dominate others! From such spring all the evils which destroy the city. A tyrant means a man of immoral life, who usurps the rights of others and destroys

his own and his people's soul. Therefore the first law that you must make is this: that no one in future may make himself head of your city; otherwise you will be building on quicksand." But, if they clove to his counsel, he promised them a dazzling future. " People of Florence, you will begin the reform of all Italy; you will spread your wings in the world, to carry abroad the reform of all peoples. Remember that the Lord has given plain signs of His purpose to renew all things, and that you are the chosen people elected to this great enterprise, provided you follow His commands, who summons and invites you to return to the spiritual life. . . . When you have purified your souls, corrected your intentions, condemned gaming, lechery, and blasphemy, then set your hand to the government and make a first outline, leaving the details and corrections for later. . . . The form best adapted to your city is that of a Grand Council, in the Venetian manner. . . . You see how ever since this government has existed in Venice, there has been no sect or dissension of any sort; we must needs believe, therefore, that it comes from God."

The combination of moral and political reasoning, the former serving to simplify the latter, when any difficulty arose, proved of great efficacy with the public, and the Grand Council was approved in the form he proposed. As a democratic body, it was, however, only approximately universal. Membership was restricted to qualified voters; the qualifications included age — a

minimum of twenty-nine years; financial standing — the payment of taxes; and family — only those citizens whose forefathers had held or run for office were eligible. The revolution was a middle class movement and the new constitution 'represented' only 3,200 beneficiaries out of a population of 90,000. Even in this form, the Grand Council was unwieldy, for its members were not represented by delegates but sat in person; and it was necessary to provide for its tripartition, each section sitting for a period of three months. An upper House of eighty members was selected to expedite business and to serve as an intermediary between the popular assembly and the administrative arm of the Government — the Signoria and its colleges — in which legislation was initiated. In this body and the Signoria the executive functions of government were invested, the powers of the Grand Council being limited to the approval of the laws and the nomination of the magistrates. The new institution was cumbersome, and in the interest of efficiency it developed more and more, as time went on, toward an oligarchical ideal.

A month after the departure of the French, the new Signoria entered office, amid the acclamations of the people who filled the Piazza, 'thanking God who had given this impartial government to Florence.' The credit for it redounded, in an overwhelming degree, to Savonarola who, as the go-between the Palace and the people, had created for himself a curious position, unofficial and

irresponsible but immensely influential in preparing the minds of the voters; and the honors and the onus of every succeeding measure were laid in the public mind ' to the instigation of the Frate.'

For the next three months he was incessantly occupied in promoting a series of reforms. The first and most pressing was that of the tax-system. Its arbitrary assessments, its forced loans, and the farming of the levies, had supplied him with grievances against tyranny, and the revolution had been facilitated by an economic depression, which was aggravated by the invasion. Poverty and unemployment were widespread; his efforts to relieve them by charity were a mere measure of first aid, and one of his first campaigns was to restore confidence and industry by a radical reform of the fiscal system. The result was the *Decima,* a universal ten per-cent.tax on real property levied at a regular yearly interval. Sound in principle, it caused the Government acute embarrassment, however, as it diminished its already impoverished resources. To meet the French indemnity, to run its expenses, and to finance a war against Pisa, it disposed of a drained exchequer and was hampered, in its efforts to fill it, by reforms and retrenchments at every turn. When it required a public loan to meet the indemnity, the shops shut and the city went on strike. The popular temper was dangerous on this point. The money-scare bred persecution. Hoarders of gold were lynched; one of these unfortunates hung for two weeks

from the windows of the *Palazzo del Capitano*. Savonarola himself narrowly escaped a scandal. During his absence, the Cardinal de' Medici had deposited his valuables at San Marco, when he fled from Florence; these came to light during a perquisition of the Government; and the Prior was forced to disculpate himself from the pulpit. When he secured the establishment of the *Monte di Pietà*, a public loan office, he ran into difficulties with the Jews, who were regarded by the authorities as necessary maggots in the body politic, whose rottenness kept it sound. It had always been argued that by providing financial relief, even at exorbitant rates, they not only supported commerce but prevented crimes of violence, prompted by need and despair; and Florence prided itself on its record of low criminal activity. Under Piero the Frati Minori had imprudently attacked the Jews, and the result had been rioting; and a previous reformer, under his grandfather, had been banished for agitating the question. But Savonarola, launching a furious attack on ' the pestiferous affliction and cankerous worm of usury, endured for sixty years in Florence, of the perfidious and God-hating Hebraic sect,' swept all before him. The *Monte di Pietà* was established on principles of Christian piety. Money was loaned at six, instead of thirty-two percent, and only on condition that it would not be spent in gaming; its running expenses were limited to six hundred florins a year; its organizers served without pay, and its statute was borrowed from

the Gospel: ' Blessed be he who watches over the poor and needy; in the day of adversity he will be freed by the Lord.' Shortly afterward, all money-lending Jews were banished from Florence.

On another reform he met with difficulties of a different order. The administration of political and criminal justice was the province of a department of the Signoria, the *Eight of Watch and Ward,* whose short tenure of office — two months — made them irresponsible and notoriously prone to employ their power for personal and party ends. Their power extended to all but the most conspicuous cases and included the penalties of fines, banishments, imprisonment, and sometimes even of death. To curb this abuse, it was proposed to provide a grant of appeal to the Grand Council. To this measure, known as the Reform of the Six Ballots, Savonarola gave his vigorous and whole-hearted support. " As for these six Ballots," he declared with more than his usual heat, " I tell you that we must give them a check: that is, a Council of Appeal." As to the nature of the Council, however, he was more than usually cool and far-sighted. The Grand Council he considered a remedy worse than the evil; for the popular assembly, in its number and ignorance, was easily swayed by passion and prejudice. He favored the restriction of the Appeal to the Eighty. Here he met, unexpectedly, with the opposition of the aristocratic party. Unable to prevent the reform, they attempted to defeat its efficacy

and at the same time to compromise its sponsor in the eyes of the people. His mistrust of the justice of the many was easily exploited against him; and the Appeal was passed in the form he opposed. It was a shrewd stroke. Turning his hand against him, taxing him with seeming inconsistency, distorting his reform, and at the same time accusing him of demagogic tendencies, it was well calculated to discredit him. It was his first experience of professional politics, and as he advanced into their snares, undermined by unseen manoeuvres, he lost ground.

But his popularity, growing with each new reform, was proof against such attacks. It was not easy to seriously discredit a man whose first public act had been one of humanity and practical relief and whose final one was a general amnesty for the supporters of the previous regime. At the end of his campaign he raised a benevolent appeal which won general consent: "Forgive, O Florence, forgive and make peace. Enough of blood!" The Government responded in antiphonal solemnity: "The Magnificent Signori and Gonfalonieri ordain a general peace and that all the offenses and penalties to which the supporters of the late government are liable be forgiven."

The campaign had been one of whirlwind rapidity. In three months he was able to look back upon a notable series of achievements: the new Constitution, the reform of justice, the re-organization of the taxes, the

extinction of usury, the foundation of the *Monte di Pietà,* and a general amnesty. He had seized, startled, and swept Florence with him, and his acts praised him. But he looked on them without elation. There was a reverse to the picture. The march of progress had been accompanied, step by step, by the swiftening pace of his enemies; and in the hour of victory his achievements smote him with a deepening presentiment of doom.

## III

His enemies — they were all about him, unseen, insidious, insistent, united in their intrigues, cohering in their cross-purposes, multitudinous and one in their common antipathy to his creed of union and peace. They began in his own party. The *Bianchi,* devoted to his political ideas but indifferent to his religious ones, were composed of those sober elements which, at all times in Italy, have been suspicious of priestcraft and contemptuous of friars; and they had no love for Savonarola. Inoffensive as their name, the *Whites* represented, nevertheless, that spirit of tepidity and scepticism which was most antagonistic to his militant temperament and which, wherever and whenever he met it, he most dreaded. More menacing and more numerous, the *Bigi,* the ex-Mediceans, who still nursed the hope of an eventual restoration, had rallied to his party as the result of the amnesty to use it as 'cover' for their

intrigues. But the most stubborn opposition came from the oligarchical party which had been defeated in its efforts to restrict the Grand Council, a group of rabid reactionaries who gloried in their nickname of *Arrabbiati.* Equally opposed to democracy and despotism, they were numerically too weak as yet to combat him openly; but their resistance, as his setback with the reform of the Six Ballots showed, was none the less effective for being surreptitious.

In addition to his political opponents, and only too ready to serve them, his colleagues of the cloth were startled into scandalized activity by his rapid rise. The jealousy of rival orders, always prompt to break out even on the most trivial provocation, was at first stunned by the magnitude of the Dominican menace; and after the first shock, the monasteries began to stir with shrill cries of outraged villatic fowl. The Franciscans immediately ranged themselves with the Arrabbiati; and even Dominicans of other parishes joined the hue and cry. While he was preaching the Appeal, one of these attacked him from the pulpit with his own cry of Liberty. The new Government was no sooner elected than the Gonfalonier, who was favorable to the Arrabbiati, summoned a council of theologians, headed by a Dominican of S. Spirito, to the Palace and declared his intention of interpellating the Friar on the propriety of his conduct in meddling with politics. At that moment Savonarola and Fra Domenico entered the room; and the

startled covy immediately rose to the attack. Though he had stumbled unsuspecting on the nest, he was not caught unawares. He was prepared for the charge, he had answered it already in the days of Lorenzo, and he rebutted it again with the same arguments, with the ease of an improvisation prepared long beforehand. " In me is verified now the saying of the Lord: *Filii matris mea pugnaverunt contra me,*" he said. " But it grieves me to see my most determined adversary wearing the cloth of St. Dominic. It should remind him that our founder intervened not a little in secular affairs, and that from our Order issued a multitude of clerics and saints who concerned themselves with politics. The Florentine Republic should remember Cardinal Latino, St. Peter Martyr, St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Antony, all of whom belonged to the Order of St. Dominic. It is not the fact of intervening in the things of this world, in which God after all has placed us, that merits rebuke in a cleric, but of doing so without a superior aim, without regard to the good of religion." Then he composed himself for a final retort. " What is far more true, you will find, is that religion should not be debated in public places nor theology in the Palace." The assembly sat in disconcerted silence; but as he turned to depart, a voice cried: " Come now, tell us plainly. Do your words come from God or no? " " What I have said, I have said publicly," he replied. " I have nothing to add now." And he passed out.

Such attacks were mild and seemly, however, compared to the abuse of the streets. The ingenious sarcasms of popular invective labelled him and his followers with stinging names: the Piagnoni were not merely 'wailers,' they were 'neck-twisters,' 'giraffes,' 'hand-rubbers,' and 'masticators of paternosters.' The sanctimonious and the visionary were the butt of an inexhaustible fund of gutter wit; and ridicule was a form of persecution to which he was sensitive. The strain of resisting attack, the exertions of the past months, the ceaseless expenditure of his vitality, the untiring alertness of all his faculties in a new and unfamiliar field of activity, told on his health, and he broke down. In the hour of his triumphs he was heavy with despondency. By night the gibes of the day returned in his dreams; he was plagued by devils who piped on his name infernal puns—'Frate Girolamo, Frate Gira-l'uomo'—'Father Confessor, Father Confusor.' In the pulpit, his physical weakness was apparent; he would be forced to pause in the midst of a sermon and sit down; and after it was over, he would take to his bed. In this enfeebled condition melancholy wrung from him, at times, a cry of personal distress. He pictured himself, one day, in a parable which was frankly personal. "A youth went forth from his house and embarked on a boat to fish and the captain brought him onto the high seas, where the port was lost to sight; wherefore the youth began to lament loudly. O Florence! that lamenting

youth stands here in this pulpit. I was led from the house of my father, when I was in my twenty-third year, to seek freedom and peace, two things which I loved above all. But I gazed on the waters of the world and began to win some few souls by my preaching; and the Lord embarked me on a vessel and brought me to the high seas, where now I am and where I see the port no longer. *Undique sunt angustiae.*" His anguish welled up in more than official suffering. " O Lord! O Lord! Whither have You led me? That I might save some few souls, I am come into an unquiet place, whence I can not return to my peace. Wherefore have You made me a man of discord and strife throughout all the world? I was free and now I am the slave of all. I foresee on all sides discord and war coming upon me. But you, O my friends, O elect of God, you for whom I suffer night and day, have mercy on me. Give me flowers, even as the song says: *Quia amore langueo.* The flowers are good deeds, and nothing I desire save that you save your souls and find favor with God." The last pretense of anonymity vanished from his emotional appeals; he was a man baring his heart to the world; and the disciple who took down his words was often forced to interrupt them and to note in the breaks: ' Here my tears overcame me.' But he was beyond the relief of histrionic sympathy; the play had turned to grim earnest; and sometimes he turned on his public with reproach. " O Florence! Ungrateful Florence! Ungrateful people! I

have done for you what I refused to do for my own brothers, for whom I would never woo the princes of the world. And now all that I have done for you brings on my head so much envy of laymen and clergy! "

The point on which vituperation and attack concentrated with most deadly persistence was his foreign policy — or rather his lack of it. In the midst of reorganization the Government attempted to carry on a campaign against Pisa, a campaign half military, half diplomatic. Some troops were put into the field, but there was no money to pay them, and the operations dwindled to desultory skirmishes. The French had left a garrison in the Pisan forts, and the Government appealed to Charles to restore its rebellious vassal. A stream of despatches followed him to Naples, and the answer was always the same — promises without performance. Ambassadors were sent to him; his conquests were celebrated with bonfires and bells; but nothing availed. Instead, the Cardinal of St. Malo arrived to claim the indemnity. For an additional 30,000 florins he promised to restore Pisa, but he undertook more than he could perform and he returned to Naples with only a third of the indemnity. The King began to lose his temper. " Can I help it," he said to the ambassadors, " if your Signori dissatisfy their subjects? " The Florentines, on their side, complained that ' the king had a hand in it, as he held both the citadels of Pisa.' But instead of venting their resentment on Charles, they wreaked it on

the Government; and the Arrabbiati, with all the fury of professional patriots and political reactionaries, manipulated public opinion so as to make the Friar responsible for their deception. To calm the popular agitation, he promised on Divine authority the eventual recovery of Pisa, and as the disappointments continued, they heckled him continuously as a visionary. At the end of March, the situation took a very serious turn. Ludovico was ready to spring his trap; he had formed a League, consisting of Venice, Genoa, the Papal States, Spain and the Emperor, to crush the French; and Florence was invited to join it. Charles, awaking to the danger, was preparing to hurry home; the city was caught between two camps; and its decision was a test of the foresight and sagacity of the Popular Government. The Arrabbiati espoused the cause of the League; Savonarola threw the whole weight of his influence in favor of the French . . . and carried the day. It was a fatal victory. No sooner was the decision made than Florence regretted it. Isolated in Italy, exposed to the retaliation of the League, it had, in compensation, only the forlorn hope of the recovery of Pisa to look forward to; and repeated experience had taught it what faith to place in the king. Then, to cap the disaster, it was learned that he was returning in wrath, scattering death and destruction about him, and that Piero de' Medici was in his camp. In a panic, the city began to arm. Everything — even the fruits of the revolution seemed lost;

and no policy, it seemed, could have been more mischievous than that which exposed the city to the danger of the League, the French, and the Medici, at once. The Arrabbiati traced the situation to its source — the credulity of Florence in its visionary Friar; nor did they content themselves with gibes. On his way to the Duomo, Savonarola was set upon in the street, and thereafter, when he went abroad, he was accompanied by an armed escort.

He made a vigorous effort to avert the disaster. He did not regret his decision. The isolation of Florence in Italy he was willing to face: it reflected his own; and it was fitting that the city chosen for reform should stand alone. Moreover, he mistrusted the League as a means for the restoration of the Medici far more than the French. With Charles he felt that he could cope. And he was loyal. He owed him much — the revolution, the regeneration of Florence; he still hoped to owe him the reform of the Church. On his passage through Rome, the king had been urged by sixteen Cardinals to undertake it, and at one moment he had pointed his guns on Sant' Angelo. Then he had forgotten and passed on; but the Paladinesque pledge had been within an inch of fulfillment. He could not forsake him; their destinies were intertwined by a superior power; and he staked everything, his fortunes and the fortunes of Florence, on the royal good faith. From the pulpit he continued to assure the public that 'matters would not

turn out ill' and that 'this cloud would pass on and rain elsewhere.' But he wrote to Charles, urgently and repeatedly, reminding him that 'the Florentines were his friends and confederates, and this mainly through his preaching,' warning him against the Medici, who would use him for their purposes and abandon him 'as soon as they found means to do so'; alluding to 'the many offers which had been made to the City by the other powers of Italy,' all of which had been rejected 'thanks to his exhortations and preaching'; imploring him to restore Pisa and observe his pacts; and assuring him that 'this which I write to you is Holy Writ, and all other counsels are contrary to your State, your welfare, your health, and your salvation.' Uncertain of the royal post, he repeated the substance of each letter in the next; uncertain of the royal Latin, he wrote in French; uncertain of the royal mood, he employed appeal, remonstrance, rebuke, and intimidation in turn. But the letters remained unanswered. Finally, he set out to meet him at Poggibonsi. Face to face with him, he regained his personal ascendancy and succeeded in persuading him to avoid Florence; but as for Pisa, he could obtain only a new set of promises. On his return to Florence, the relief of the city at the averted occupation eclipsed its disappointment with respect to Pisa, and he was welcomed with open arms. But not for this did the Arrabbiati cease their scoffing. When Charles passed through Pisa, a demonstration of women,

masquerading as slaves, stirred his chivalrous heart and he renewed his promise to champion its liberty. The hapless prophet was pilloried in bitter lampoons.

> In the pulpit you said, to feed
> Noble and people and patrician:
> 'Pisa I hold in my hand.' — Indeed?
>
> Ask pardon of all men, and mind:
> Feed Florence no longer on wind.
>
> O betrayer of the Florentines,
> That have made bitter this state,
> Hoping to recover its confines,
> Fine soil you frittered away,
> Father Onion, sallow and grey,
> In face and in act color of clay.

The vexed question was a long time dying. Many letters and appeals continued to pursue Charles into France; but Pisa, like Florence, continued to enjoy the blessings of liberty. The only satisfaction which Savonarola could offer his countrymen was the realization of a prophecy that Charles would lose 'the dearest thing he owned,' if he broke faith. The Dauphin died; but even this visitation was of scant effect; for he procreated another.

## IV

With the passing of the French, Piero de' Medici passed into the camp of the League in search of support. The menace of a Medici *coup* forced the Arrabbiati to make common cause for a time with the Frateschi, and their overt attacks on the Friar subsided. But they did not cease. They took a covert and more dangerous form; they plunged underground and undermined him by an expedient so simple that the only wonder was that it had not been tried before. And indeed it had. Three months earlier, at the height of his political campaign, orders had come from Rome transferring him to Lucca for the period of Lent. The vigorous intercession of the Government had secured their repeal; but he had immediately recognized their instigation. " There are many in the city," he said at the time, " who wish to kill me " — but there was indeed no need for violence: he could be quietly removed at any time by an appeal to Rome. A mere turn of the wheel in the machine of ecclesiastical administration, and he would disappear automatically from the scene: the wires had only to be pulled very gently at the opportune moment. And in June the moment was not only opportune, it was imperative. The most certain — the only certain — method of neutralizing Piero's designs was to bring republican Florence into the League. Though the French

had slipped through its hands, the League had served its purpose in consolidating Italian patriotism; and the Pope, even more than Ludovico, was determined to convert it into a permanent safeguard against the return of the foreigner. The adhesion of Florence was still desired, and the only obstacle was the Friar. Such was the tenor of the advices which Somenzi, Ludovico's confidential agent in Florence, sent to Milan; furthermore, the Duke was given to understand that he was the particular target of the Friar's denunciation of despots. These considerations were transmitted to Cardinal Ascanio in Rome, and in due time and in a somewhat altered form they reached the desk of the Pope. To him it was represented that the prophecies of the Friar and his political activities in Florence were a source of commotion which would bear investigation. The machine began to work. In July a Brief, couched in language of impenetrable blandness, reached San Marco. "Beloved son," His Holiness wrote. "Greetings and Apostolic benedictions! We hear that among all who labor in the vineyards of the Lord, you toil with most zeal; in which we rejoice and give thanks to Omnipotent God. We hear likewise that you claim your predictions of the future come not from you, but from God; wherefore we desire, as it is the duty of our Pastoral office, to converse with you that, being better informed through you of the pleasure of God, we may fulfill it. By virtue of holy obedience, we charge you therefore

to come to us with all speed, and we shall welcome you with love and charity."

The Prior did not hesitate. The muffling hand had fallen and at the very moment when his voice was most needed. For the following Sunday he had scheduled the defense of a measure, which was to be the safeguard of all his reforms — the abolition of the popular Parliaments. These assemblies, by which the crowd was convoked in the Piazza to approve by acclamation measures which it only half heard and half understood, were an illusory form of popular sovereignty and an actual instrument of revolution and tyranny; they were the means by which every upheaval and change of government was engineered and through which the Arrabbiati would, when their time came, attempt to overthow the democratic regime. The abolition of a nominal freedom was essential to substantial liberty; but to tamper with the name of independence is more dangerous than to attack its substance; and all his skill, his eloquence, and his authority were required for the defense of the measure. He determined to champion it with his last breath, and then . . . ? The Brief could not be ignored; neither could it be obeyed. Too much was at stake, and besides, he had an intimate conviction that if once he left Florence he would never return to it alive. In such a dilemma, the time-honored policy of every Italian statesman was his only course — to temporize, to submit for a time and allow the storm to blow over.

Accordingly, he composed his reply to the Pope in terms of no less impenetrable blandness; and with the skill of perfect sincerity, he enlisted his sympathy by a frank avowal of his difficulties, his dangers, and his responsibilities. " Blessed Father," he wrote, " I desire nothing more ardently than to behold the threshold of the Apostles Peter and Paul; and I should gladly have come, now that the Holy Father deigns to summon his humble servant. But I have hardly recovered from a grave malady, which has forced me to suspend preaching and study, and I am still in danger of my life. Moreover, I am held to obey the benevolent intention rather than the literal word. The Lord having spared this city through me a great effusion of blood and converted it to good and holy laws, there are many enemies both within and without who, having hoped to reduce her to servitude and failed, desire my blood and have more than once attempted my life with poison and steel. I could not move therefore without manifest danger and even in the city I dare not walk abroad without an armed escort. Furthermore, this new reform which the Lord has been pleased to introduce through me into the city has as yet no firm roots and is in evident peril without constant support; wherefore, in the opinion of all good and wise citizens, my departure would be of grave detriment to the city, while it would be of little value in Rome. I can not suppose that my superior desires the ruin of an entire city; I trust therefore that Your

Holiness will kindly admit this delay, in order that we may bring to perfection this reform begun by the will of the Lord, for the advantage of which, I am certain, He has brought forth these impediments to my departure."

The reply was dated, signed, sealed; but it was despatched only after the delivery of his final sermon. If his first had been filled with the tenderness of charity, his last was stern and combative. The excuse which he offered the Pope was only too true, his health was failing; and the strain and exasperation of the past six months had told not only on his physical powers but on his spirit. He no longer had the strength to be magnanimous; his weakness, as in first youth, made him vindictive; and a choleric acerbity surged up in his blood. Men must be led with a hard hand, and at the threat of seeing his hard-won reforms jeopardized, he grew violent. In defending the measure, he recommended the extreme penalties for its infraction. " I have been thinking of this Parliament of yours. . . . This Parliament, you must know, is nothing but a means of stealing the government from the people. I would have you make a law, therefore, that when the Signory enter office, it take oath to call none; in the event of any such attempt, the informer, if he be of the Signoria, to receive a reward of 30,000 ducats, and all others 1000. And if the attempt be made by a member of the Signoria, behead him; if by another, declare him a rebel and confiscate

his property. The Gonfalonieri, on assuming office, to swear, if they hear the bell ring for Parliament, to run and sack the houses of the Signoria; and each to receive a quarter of his substance, and the remainder to be allotted to his colleagues. If the Signori as a body attempt to call a Parliament, that they be destituted as soon as they appear on the platform and every man permitted to cut them to pieces without sin." The same exasperation inflamed his other recommendations. He had barely begun his campaign of moral reform; everything for which he had struggled was yet undone. The Government had indeed provided a drastic penalty for the ' unnatural vice ' — the pillory for a first and second offense and burning for the third; but the edict had remained a dead letter. " O Florence," he protested, " you would be more merciful than God. But your mercy is madness: you have a cruel pity; do justice, I tell you, on this nefarious vice. I tell you, the Omnipotent demands justice; you must act and make an example, seize one and lead him out and say, This man merits death. Otherwise, your city will crumble. Give over your balls, give over your games, shut up your taverns. I tell you, O Florence, this is a time for weeping and not for feasting." Then, his fury vented, he took leave in a tone of sombre resignation. " My people, when I am up here, I am always in good health. But when I descend from the pulpit, I shall have my troubles, I dare say, and it will be some time before I see you again. I shall

preach again, if I live — in a month, I think, unless your prayers call me back sooner. . . . But the welfare of Florence will remain, in any case. The wicked may labor but this seed is destined to flourish, for God wills it. I could name to-day the authors of your dangers, but I wish to harm no man; you will know them when they are punished. I conclude, therefore, having labored and preached so long that I have cut off my life by many years and am deeply exhausted. — Well, Friar," he interpellated himself, " and what reward would you have for your pains? Martyrdom, I reply. I am willing to endure it; daily, O Lord, for the love of this city I pray for it."

Then he withdrew to the obscurity of his cell and the peace of his sick-bed. Day after day slipped by in blessed uneventfulness; and between him and the world a veil of oblivious fever descended. Through that ethereal apathy an ineffable sensation stole over his heat. It was raining; ever since the coming of the Flood, the deluge had fallen, intermittently, interminably; and the only sound that reached him, as he lay on his pallet, was the long gush of the waters on the flagstones of the court and the runnels of the eaves, washing away strife, washing away pain, washing away memory. The world became a place of silence and greyness and peace; his being flowed, with the waters, in a dim somnolence. In the relief of that welcome malady, his brain lapsed into mystic nonentity;

light, very light, in the elation of fever, it hovered on the confines of death, hovered and yearned, straining and buoyant, toward the release of everlasting rest.

He was suffering from gastric trouble.

## VII

# *Moral Reforms*

### I

THE suspension of his political activity had its advantage. It left him free to devote himself wholly to his moral reforms. A beginning had already been made. Amid all the demands of political reconstruction, he had not neglected his spiritual mission. Into the revolutionary upheaval he had scattered the good seed with an assiduous and august hand, and it had begun to take root. Backed by the prestige of political accomplishment, his exhortations gained a new weight. Tradesmen, when traffic was slack, read the Bible; merchants restored their ill-gotten gains; women sacrificed their vanities to charity. Economy, honesty, and devotion became the watch-words of the hour. These were gratifying results; but how small compared to what yet remained to be done. The solid immovable mass of the wicked in their obduracy remained to be attacked. But now, equipped at last with the power of a lawgiver, he was in a position to grapple with them. The statute

against sodomy had been written into the law-books; another on blasphemy was proposed, provided with as formidable a penalty — burning of the offending member. Men might exclaim against such ferocity; but mercy toward sin was 'a cruel pity'; if they would not love God, they must learn to fear Him. The threat would suffice — for, despite everything, he shrank from its enforcement — but appeal was more effective, supported by the hint of force. For this battle he needed all his strength; it was the supreme effort of his life. By the conquest of eloquence, he had won the power of persuasion; by the gift of political influence, that of coercion. On all sides, the world was opening before him, and it was for him to thrust in his arm, to strangle the perversity of human nature, to master the lawlessness of unbridled life, to correct Creation, to re-form it in the Divine Image — or merely in his own — for that function of a lesser god was no longer a day-dream.

With returning health, his combative ardor revived. The fever fled his limbs, another lodged in his brain. The mysticism of the sick-bed, personal and passive, was transformed into the militant and selfless ecstasy of stimulating masses of men, of developing their collaboration toward a common end, of quickening the life-blood of a community, until its respiration attunes it to inspiration and promotes its indwelling conscience. He was a public man, and he lived now only in the common life of men. He was a sick man, and he could not recover

his health, until he had brought about the spiritual welfare of the city.

But before he could undertake his campaign, he was involved in new difficulties with Rome, which required for a time all his attention. Piero de' Medici had received encouragement from the League and was raising money and men for an expedition against Florence. The encouragement, it was true, consisted of vague promises, which left the organization of the expedition to his own resources; but in one important respect Ludovico Sforza, who otherwise had little use for him, was ready to serve him, namely, in the removal of the Friar from Florence. The Pope had graciously accepted his excuses, and for seven weeks no more was heard of the invitation to Rome. But with the preparation of the Medici expedition, activity again awoke in the Vatican. In September, another Brief reached Florence, couched in violent language, revoking the ' scandalous separation ' from the Lombard Congregation, and submitting the whole question to the authority of the Vicar-General of the Lombards, on pain of excommunication. At a stroke, his independence crumbled, and he realized the danger of further resistance. " I know the root of these stratagems," he wrote to a colleague in Rome, " they proceed from perverse citizens, who hope to restore tyranny in Florence and who are working in agreement with certain princes in Italy. Nevertheless, if I can not satisfy my conscience otherwise, I am determined to

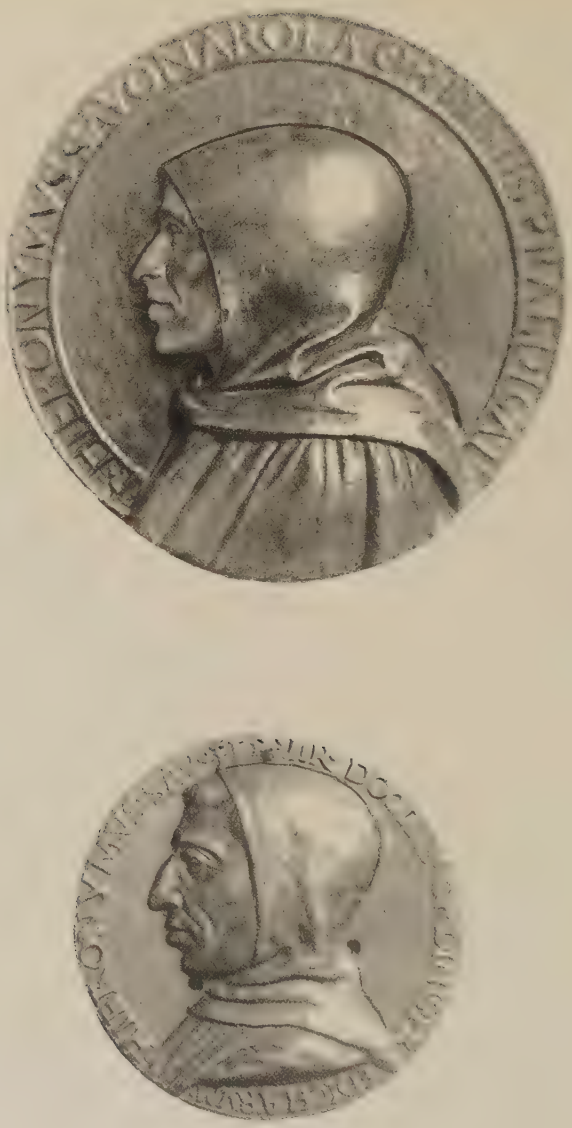
obey, so as not to sin even venially. For the time being, I desist and take no rash decision, on the advice of the physicians." But he protested to the Pope. " To submit our cause to the decision of the Vicar of Lombardy," he wrote, " is to make our adversary our judge, since the friction of the two Congregations is commonly known. To unite us with our Lombard brothers would be to increase the rancors which unfortunately exist between the two Congregations and would only cause new dissensions and scandals." He defended himself from the accusations which were the pretext of the Brief. His doctrine was sound; and as for the charge that he was ' profiting by these commutations in Italy to make the people believe him inspired by God, without proving it either by miracles or special testimony of Holy Writ, as the canonical laws require,' he declared that he had never claimed *absolutely* to be a prophet, ' though this would not be heresy '; and he concluded, " Having proven the falsity of the charges raised against me, I trust that I may receive from Your Holiness a reply in my defense and an absolution. . . . I repeat once more what I have always said, that I submit myself and all my writings to the correction of the Roman Church." At the same time, he wrote to influential friends in Rome, and the Government seconded his efforts with pressing appeal to the Cardinal of Naples and the group which originally obtained the Separation.

The Florentine Ambassador reported that the Pope

was highly incensed by the reply of the Friar. It placed him indeed in a difficult position. On the one hand, he was committed for political reasons to removing him; on the other, his ecclesiastical integrity was embarrassed. If he had been unscrupulous, there would have been no dilemma and no anger; but Alexander had his professional scruples. He had an administrative conscience, and he appreciated the force of the Friar's arguments. He had, too, despite all the laxity of his personal life, a jealous sense of propriety in matters of doctrinal soundness; and the Friar's record was clear. Toward supernatural claims he was, however, severe, and he viewed those of Savonarola with genuine concern. The conflict of these discordant considerations was sufficient to upset him; and the perfect correctitude of his correspondent, with its flattering appeal to his own, was in the highest degree annoying. He chose the only solution — he temporized and replied by a letter of reluctant lenience. "In other letters," he wrote, we have manifested our displeasure at these Florentine uprisings of which your sermons have been a prime cause; since, instead of preaching against vice and recommending union, you have predicted the future, a thing which can only breed discord in any peaceful people, and far more so in the Florentine, in whom lie so many seeds of ill humor and faction. For these reasons we summoned you to us; but now that, by your letters and the representations of many Cardinals, we feel that you are ready to

obey the Roman Church, we rejoice greatly, in the persuasion that you have erred rather through overweening simplicity than malice of spirit. Wherefore we reply once more to your letters and in virtue of holy obedience command you to abstain from all preaching, not only in public but in private, so that it may not be said that from the pulpit you have turned to conventicles. In this course you are to persist until you can more safely and becomingly appear before us, who will receive you with joyous and fatherly heart, or until we have more maturely deliberated what course you are to adopt, or designated a proper person to settle these questions. And if, as we doubt not, you are willing to obey, we will suspend all our previous Briefs, that you may attend in peace to your spiritual welfare."

Before the Brief reached San Marco, Savonarola had cast caution to the winds and made a sudden and dramatic re-appearance in the pulpit to rouse the public to the danger of the Medici. "The life of man, O my brothers, is a continual strife upon earth; and the greatest strife is that of the true Christian, because he must fight everything which opposes the spirit. He fights the world, the flesh, the devil, and is forever at war. So it was with the Apostles, so it was with the martyrs, so it will be with the true Christian: God wills it, to give us greater glory in the next world. You should not marvel therefore if our innovations meet with so much opposition, I marvel that they do not meet with more.



*Medallions of Savonarola*

FRA LUCA E FRA AMBROGIO DELLA ROBBIA

And because we must fight, we have returned to the field, to re-organize our scattered forces and prepare for a new war." Even if he were suppressed, he cried, the movement would be irrepressible — 'like the Hydra of the poets, when one head is lopped off, seven more spring up.' "Two things we propose to do: first, to fight, which we shall never cease to do till death; second, to conquer, for the cause of Christ is bound to triumph." But he added a significant caution. "He that trusts in divine aid without helping himself tempts the Lord." Accordingly, for the partisans of the Medici, "we must deal with them as the Romans did with those who attempted to restore Tarquin. You have no respect for Christ; would you have more for private citizens? Do justice, I tell you. Cut off their heads. Remember the law we passed against the Parliaments. Teach it to your sons, inscribe it everywhere. You shall have no other trust," he concluded with the finality of the Law and the Commandments, "than the Grand Council, which is the work of God and of no mortal man; and he that would change it, he that would create tyrants, he that would establish a government of private citizens, shall be cursed of the Lord in eternity."

The Government put a price on the head of Piero de' Medici. It was the only money which that unfortunate head could raise, for the hapless youth, after spending his all for troops, found his means insufficient and was forced, as money, men, and spirits melted away, to

abandon the expedition. With the passing of the danger, Savonarola again retired. The growing strain of his relations with Rome, the sword ever suspended over his head, required the utmost circumspection on his part, and he submitted therefore, without remonstrance, to the muting finger of St. Peter. Silence: even St. Dominic was painted on the walls of San Marco with that admonishing gesture. Silence: he welcomed it himself as a respite from struggle; but he was not inactive. The opportunity had now come to undertake his moral campaign.

## II

With the recurrence of Carnival (1496) an excellent occasion presented itself. Time out of mind Carnival in Florence had been celebrated with a lawless violence and ribaldry which the magistrates had vainly attempted to suppress. Public-spirited citizens, the Eight, the Signoria itself, had tackled the problem; prohibitions and penalties of the severest character had been declared; but in vain — and for a very simple reason. It was pre-eminently the children's season — and who could suppress children? Who could punish their pranks with the stern rigor of the law? The sentimental immunity, which makes tyrants of the weak and the small, gave them a licence of which they made full use. Nor were their pranks innocent; the primitive instincts of

the Florentine populace were unbridled in their young; and the boys were the real Arrabbiati of Florence. After the Pazzi conspiracy, they dug up the corpse of the ringleader, dragged it about the streets, and hung it to the doorbells, shouting with ghoulish glee: "Knock at the door!" When the carrion had startled the quick a sufficient number of times, it was flung into the Arno, but the boys were still unglutted; they fished it out again, strung it up on a tree, beat it, and finally rolled it back to the river, where they shied stones at it. Such was the Florentine brat; and at Carnival every licence was allowed. The streets swarmed with importunate little beggars, who took toll of the passer-by with long poles, by which they barred his passage. In the Piazza the football players played at pandemonium, and the adjoining shops had to be closed against their inroads. In the evening they sang and danced about bonfires; the stones began to fly; and not a year passed without taking its death-toll. This 'mad and bestial game of stones,' as the chroniclers called it, was the object of general complaint, of clerical rebukes, of civic ordinances; but nothing could extirpate it. The young were training for the factious life of their fathers; and their elders, recognizing their incarnate sins, were, of course, indulgent to them.

This nuisance Savonarola in turn attacked; and where others had failed, he succeeded. Realizing that habits so ingrained could not be eradicated, he adapted them

to his purpose. Lorenzo had beautified the season with mythological pageants; he did likewise, substituting Christian for classic entertainments. Religious processions were formed; and hymns replaced the lewd Carnival songs — but they were sung to the same tunes. Composed by Lorenzo's great melodist, Henrik Isaac, they could not be bettered, they had sung themselves into every Florentine heart, and there was no reason why the devil should have all the best airs. The most effective reforms change the words and respect the tunes to which humanity clings. Three weeks before Carnival, he appealed to the parents to send him their sons, and their training began. Under Fra Domenico they were organized on military lines, each squad representing a ward of the city and choosing its own head; and these captains waited upon the Signoria, who gave their official approval to the reform. Flattered by this recognition of their importance, the boys set to work with a will, and when Carnival came, Florence witnessed an amazing transformation scene. Yet, with all its magical novelty, it had a curious familiarity. The same little beggars harried the passer-by with their poles, though they collected their pennies now for the poor. At every street-corner altars had been erected, about which swarms of children jingled their alms-basins; and ' their importunacy was such,' says an eye-witness, ' that one could hardly pass without giving them money.' It was not only with zeal but with method that

they plied the passer-by; they were instructed to press women more than men, and young ones more than old. But if in some respects, old habits were merely transmogrified, in others they were indeed transformed: the ' mad and bestial game of stones ' was abandoned.

On the last day of Carnival, a solemn procession of ten thousand children, from the ages of six to sixteen, paraded the city, blowing trumpets and shouting, *Viva Christo!* Before them marched the pipers and drummers of the Government; each squad carried a banner of Christ and the Virgin; the troop flourished olive-boughs, and an enormous crowd cheered them on their way. The procession assembled at the Foundling Hospital where, in the lunettes of the light colonnade emblazoned by Luca della Robbia, their prototypes smiled in charmed porcelain on the swarm of emulous innocents; proceeded to San Marco; crossed the river, winding from bridge to bridge; trudged through the Piazza; and wound up at the Duomo, where an enormous congregation, the women on one side, the men on the other, added to their collection money, ornaments, silver spoons, veil-holders, towels and miscellaneous trinkets. The scene moved many to tears. In the words of a happy father, whose sons were ' among those blessed and pure-minded troops of boys,' " we seemed to see the crowds of Jerusalem who preceded and followed Christ on Palm Sunday, saying: *Blessed art thou who comest in the name of the Lord.*"

But was this miraculous transformation to vanish, like a mirage, on the morrow? By no means. It was no mirage; it was founded on perdurable realities — on the enthusiasm of youth, on its self-importance, and on its jealousy of its elders; and these motives the Friar employed to make it permanent. The boys were organized into a moral police force. They pledged themselves, on enrolling, to certain articles: to attend church regularly; to avoid public spectacles, such as races, fireworks, pageants, and acrobatic performances; to dress simply; to shun loose company, lewd poets, unclean books, dancing, fencing, and music schools; and to cut their hair at the ear — a blow at the ambiguous lads who sported a waving, fine-spun cloud of silken hair which made their sex and their morals uncertain. Their organization was carefully worked out. Each squad elected its captain and controlled his authority by four 'councillors'; and the duties of the troop were divided among the *Peacemakers,* who reconciled quarrels, the *Correctors,* who meted out punishments, the *Alms-men,* who collected offerings, the *Inquisitors,* who spied out abuses, and the *Street-Cleaners,* who whitewashed walls and sanitated noisome corners where the shrines of saints were polluted by public urinals. In return for these duties and privations what did they reap? Among normal youths, they could have but one result: their energy found its outlet in forcing others to make their own renunciations and assume their own obligations;

and this compensation was an unending source of zeal. The boys became, in their regeneration, a fiercer pest than before; and very soon a reign of holy terror ensued. Authorized by the Government, inspired by the Friar, militant and immune, they made the reform of their elders their delight and their duty. They accosted women on the street and stripped them of their 'vanities' by persuasion or force. The first of these hold-ups occasioned a serious outcry; the family of the victim protested; but in vain. Behind the children was the Friar, and behind the Friar the Government. The crusade grew. They attacked the pastry-sellers in Lent and upset their stalls; they snooped about taverns and startled the gamblers; and at the cry of 'Here come the boys of the Friar,' the dice disappeared and the party took to its heels. Even the sanctity of the home was no bar to their perquisitions. They were encouraged to spy on their parents; and they found allies among the slaves and domestics, who were incited to denounce their masters. Their immunity did not always prevent them from taking some hard knocks, and an official was delegated to accompany and protect the 'Inquisitors.'

These boys were drawn, for the most part, from the nobility and the upper classes. An old man, seeing a group singing psalms, once reproached them with abandoning the sports of their rank and their age; but he was about-faced with an exemplary lecture. The idea

had taken root, and in the children the Friar found eager allies. It was his first triumph in remoulding humanity. By putting holiness into their heart and hymn-books into their hands, he had compensated for his own youth: he had reformed the boys to whom, as a child, he could not conform: he had attacked humanity in its cradle. The reform of the children became the basis of all his reforms, and in them he placed his highest hopes. It was fitting that it should be so; there too the law of compensation worked. He had been too much of a man as a child not to remain something of a child as a man; with all his wisdom and experience, there remained a vain of puerility, a stubborn immaturity which life had never touched and developed, in his ideals. One of his followers, who shared his hopes, remarked that 'these boys will enjoy the good things which the Friar has promised'; and the remark was melancholy in its implication that their elders would not. But that remained to be seen; a beginning had been made, and it was of great promise.

## III

Meanwhile, the Government had appealed to Rome for permission to have him preach the Lenten sermons. It was orally accorded — *a mezza voce* — on condition that he moderate his tone. And at this moment no condition was easier to meet. The Pope had changed

his tactics; the menace of the Lombard Congregation was dropped, and not only the authority but the reform of San Marco was implicitly approved. In January, San Domenico di Prato, which had fallen into scandalous corruption, was united to San Marco, and Savonarola installed one of his reformed flock as its Prior. Shortly after, Alexander made another move to mollify the Friar. He had submitted his sermons to a Dominican Bishop to determine their orthodoxy, and the reply had been not only a clean bill of approval but a recommendation to ' conciliate him, if necessary, with the offer of the Purple.' The Pope acted on the suggestion. Timid and shrewd, Alexander, when he had an irksome duty to discharge, invariably chose the pleasantest way of performing it. He was of a genial temperament and disliked altercation and trouble, especially over small matters; and the imbroglio over the Congregations was a very small matter indeed, and the moral reform which was its pretext even smaller. But what was important was the reluctance of Florence to enter the League, and it was his unpleasant duty to discipline the man who was responsible for it. The offer of the Hat was a happy solution. Accordingly, a Dominican friar was despatched to Florence to propose it, with the stipulation that he alter his language. The reply was curt. " Come to my next sermon," said the Prior, " and you will hear my answer." What the friar heard was a terrific fulmination against the vices and venality of the

Vatican. Then Alexander understood that the problem was more difficult than he supposed: the man was incorruptible, fearless, and skilful, and could not be handled by the tried methods, for his case was unique — he was an incarnate conscience.

Precisely; and it is the property of conscience to be inflexible. But, like tempered steel, it is capable of contractions and expansions; and circumstances at present expanded it. Everything emboldened him — the hint of weakening in Rome, the success of his political reforms, the progress of his moral campaign — everything excited him to attack again, with renewed confidence, the most hopeless of all his reforms — that of the Roman Church. But there were other reasons as well: he attacked as a means of defense. " The first reason which determined me to return," he said from the pulpit, " is the slander of our enemies." His presence was necessary to reanimate his followers and intimidate his enemies. And finally he was obeying the law of his popularity, which forced him to startle and shock, with ever-increasing violence, to maintain his ascendancy. Thus it was that at the very moment when expediency recommended moderation and principle permitted it, a redoubled attack of conscience made him not only reckless but provocative and resulted in a series of sermons of the most inflammatory character.

The Duomo no longer sufficed to hold his hearers. A wooden amphitheater was put up against the walls; this

was the children's perch. They could no longer be kept in their beds. Rising in the wee hours, they flocked to the church, sitting for hours, singing Lauds, while the sun stole through the great grey windows, warming its enormous vaults. Gradually a multi-colored multitude assembled; and the songsters, growing shy, subsided in restless whispers. At last their expectation was rewarded. Suddenly, out of nowhere, the familiar figure climbed into the pulpit. Standing with his chin sunk on his breast, meditative as the ram mustering his attack, he surveyed his flock; his eyes closed; then he flung back his head; and the clear thrilling voice pealed forth. " What does this mean, Friar," he challenged himself, " that you have been resting so long? were you afraid of death? — Certainly not, my sons, or I should not be here now, where I am in greater danger than before. — Had you some scruple in preaching? — Not I. — Why, then? We hear that an excommunication is come, and that you are forbidden to preach. — Have you seen that excommunication? Who has sent it? But suppose it were so; do you not remember I said, even if it came, it would be worth nothing and would not profit the wicked? — What, then? Friar, you put us off too long. — Listen to me patiently, and I shall tell you. I have said to myself: before I proceed, I will consider my ways, if they are clean of all contamination. Seeing so much opposition on all sides to a little man who is not worth three groats, I said in my heart:

perhaps you have neglected your ways, and your tongue has fallen into error. I have considered only my faith, and I have found my way clean. I have always believed what the Holy Roman Church believes, and I have always submitted it to its authority. I have written to Rome that if I have preached or written any heretical doctrine, I am ready to amend and retract it in public. I am always ready to obey the Roman Church, and I say that to disobey is to be damned in eternity." After this explicit declaration, however, he proceeded to qualify it. " My superior can not command me contrary to the constitution of my Order; the Pope can not command me contrary to charity and the Gospel. I do not believe the Pope would ever do so; but if he did, I should say to him: You are no longer the Shepherd, you are no longer the Roman Church, you err. . . . Whenever the commands of one's superiors are contrary to those of God, and above all to the precept of charity, no one is bound to obey them, for it is written: It is more important to obey God than man." This was dangerous ground, opening up as it did the whole question of the individual determination of duty, incompatible with Roman tenets; and doubly so, on his own premises, since his difficulties with Rome turned not on a question of conscience but of administration. But the first law of leadership is to be right, and he swept over those pitfalls. The point, he continued, was that the Briefs had been procured by his enemies for political purposes, and

that he was justified in resisting them, as his departure would mean the temporal and moral ruin of the city. "If I saw clearly that my leaving a city meant the temporal and spiritual ruin of the people, I should not obey any man alive who bade me depart; because it would be against the commands of the Lord, and because I should assume that my superior had no desire to do harm and had been deceived by false information." With this defense, he took up the cudgels again against Rome. "Make ready, I say; for your beating, O Rome, will be great. You shall be girdled with steel, pierced with the sword, consumed with fire and flame. . . . Rome, you are sick unto death. You have lost your health, you have forsaken God; you are rotten with sins and tribulations. If you would heal, leave your diet, leave your pride, your ambition, your lecheries, your greed; these are the diet that have sickened you and that lead you unto death. . . . The Lord says: since Italy is full of the judgement of blood, full of iniquities, of whores, of ruffians and scoundrels, I will bring upon her the worst people that are, I will cast down her princes and put an end to the pride of Rome. They shall possess her sanctuaries and pollute her churches; since they have made them stables for whores, I will make them stables for swine, for that offends God less than to see them stables for whores. . . . O Italy! there shall be conturbation upon conturbation, conturbation of war upon famine, and pest upon war; conturbation

on one hand and conturbation upon the other. . . . The quick will be too few to bury the dead. There will be so many dead in the houses, that men will go about the streets crying: Put out your dead! And they will pack them on carts and on horses; they will make mountains of them and burn them. They will pass through the streets, crying: Who has dead? who has dead? And some will come forth and say: Here, take my son, take my brother, take my husband. And still they will go through the streets crying: Bring out your dead. And the human race will be so thinned out, that few will remain! *Heu! Heu! fuge de terra Aquilonis.* Flee from the land of the North Wind, from the vices, and return to Christ. A time of darkness is coming; it will rain fire and flame, stones and rocks; and it will be a turbid time. I have set you between four winds, says the Lord, between the wicked princes, prelates, priests, and citizens. Flee from their vices, take refuge together in charity. *Fuge, O Sion, quae habitas apud filiam Babilonis.* Flee, that is, from Rome, for Babylon means con-confusion, and Rome has confused Scripture, has confounded all the vices together, has confused everything. Flee from Rome and return to penitence! "

Lent was devoted almost entirely to this attack upon Rome, but in those visions of universal desolation and depravity there was one oasis, one prospect that pleased. It was the prospect which faced him every day in the pulpit, the delectable vision of those tiers of children,

drinking in open-mouthed his terrors and his appeals. With them lay the future. "In you, my children," he addressed them, "lie my hopes and the hopes of the Lord. You will govern the city of Florence well, because you have not contracted the bad habits of your fathers. But you, old man, you sit all day in your clubs and your shops spreading slander, sending abroad lies with your letters. You make many believe that I disturb Italy; it has been said to me in so many words. Fools! Where are my hosts and my means to disturb Italy? I do not disturb Italy, I announce that it will be disturbed. I foretell the scourge of your sins. A great war, O unbeliever, will make you abandon your pomp and your pride. A great pestilence, O women, will make you leave your vanities; a great famine will close your mouths, murmuring and ignorant populace. Citizens, if you will not live in the fear of God and love the free government, God will destroy you and reserve for your sons the promised felicity of Florence." The thunders rolled away; and with a sudden rustle the children rose, singing in fluent buoyant rhythms the glory of God; and over more than one in the wrapt congregation there came 'such consolation in hearing these boys sing, now above, now below, now from one side, now from another, modestly and low, as if to themselves, that the church seemed full of angels and it appeared impossible that it was done by boys.'

On Palm Sunday another procession was formed.

This time the girls as well as the boys took part in it; the Government officials and a great crowd followed. The children, dressed in white, with olive-wreaths on their heads and crosses in their hands, were preceded by a tabernacle representing Christ on the ass, surmounted by an umbrella; and in clear treble tones they raised, at regular intervals, their migratory cry: ' Long live Christ our King! ' In the Duomo the Friar welcomed them. " O Lord, from the mouths of these children will come your true praises. Philosophers laud You by the natural light, these by the supernatural; philosophers out of self-love, these out of simplicity; philosophers with the tongue, and these with practice." Raising the Crucifix, he appealed to the people. " Florence, this is the ruler of the universe. Will you have him for your king? " And again, with guttural shouts and delirious sobs, the cry rang out, *Long live Christ our King!* The Government adopted it as its motto, and it was inscribed on the walls of the Communal Palace, as a perennial echo.

## IV

But to perpetuate that echo, to engrave it on the hearts of men, more permanent and more impenetrable than stone, required yet mightier efforts. He had won the children, and the women in part; but these were the mere outworks of the citadel: the obdurate heart of the

city resisted him still. But there was a group through which he sought to penetrate it, a group intermediate, as it were, between youth and age, between women and men — the artists. He placed a high value on their influence. They were the image-makers, who reflected and moulded the taste of the day; and their influence had been too long prostituted to the pagan idolatry of the age, the hedonism and sensuality of Lorenzo's heyday, the aimless pursuit of beauty and the mere celebration of life. He was not, however, an iconoclast; he was akin himself to the artist; and his own passion was a perversion of the creative impulse. It sprang from an acute sensitiveness; it moved to remould the world in the image of his temperament; but it was sterile, because it substituted action for vision, purpose for understanding; he was a victim of the will which limits and blights. Without purpose art had no meaning for him; it was idle; and because it was idle, it was demoralizing. He recalled the artists to their responsibility and their errors. He protested against representing the Virgin in the ornate habiliments of the day. "You bring every vanity into church. Do you think the Virgin was as you paint her? I tell you, she was robed like a beggar." He protested yet more vigorously against the use of well-known courtesans as models of Scriptural characters. "And the young men go about saying to this woman and that: she is the Magdalen, she is the Virgin, he is St. John, because you paint their figures in the churches, to

the great detriment of Divine things. You painters do great harm; and if you knew, as I know, the scandal you breed you would desist." He went further and expounded to them the nature of the Beautiful. "In what does beauty consist? In colors? No. In features? No. . . . Beauty is a quality which results from the proportions and correspondence of all the members and parts of the body. . . . Whence comes this beauty? If you investigate it, you will find that it comes from the soul. . . . Take two women of equal beauty, one good, pure, and respectable, the other a courtesan; in one you will see the radiance of an almost angelic beauty, and the other, however shapely, will not compare with her. The good woman, you will see, will be all the more loved and admired, even by carnal men. And this is because the good participate in the beauty of God and diffuse it in the body. . . . Women who glory in your hair, your hands, your ornaments, I tell you, you are all ugly. Shall I show you true beauty? Observe some devout woman praying, how the warmth of Divine Beauty illumines her; watch her when she returns from her orisons, you will see the beauty of God shine in her features, and her face will be like that of an angel."

Among the artists he made many converts — Michelangelo, Botticelli, Cronaca, Lorenzo di Credi; two of the della Robbia and Bartolommeo della Porta entered San Marco. The latter was so affected by his death that

he forswore painting for four years; Cronaca could speak of no one else; Michelangelo, in his cheerless old age, read and re-read his sermons for comfort. They not only hearkened and mended their errors; they developed his doctrine. The gospel of death took a deep hold on their minds, and they popularized it in many forms. They illustrated his sermons and visions; they turned out, for the use of the devout, those bills of mortality which he recommended good Christians to keep ever before their eyes, those salutary reminders of death with which he bade them celebrate each day. They reproduced his visions of Doomsday; they pictured the ubiquitous Spectre soaring with the scythe and staggering the soul with his perpetual cry: *Ego sum*. This euthanasia affected Michelangelo profoundly. Devoured by his own world-woe, he responded from his very vitals to the gospel of death; it haunted him night and day — "no thought is born to me that is not stamped with Death," he told Vasari. He clung to it tenaciously to save his soul; it made him aware, he said, of his true nature and preserved him from squandering it 'among friends, relatives, teachers, ambitions, and desires'; he hoarded himself for death. To his art it gave a heroic vitality; he created a superhuman world of his own, filled with towering prophets and hypochondriac seers; and in the buoyant convulsions of *The Last Judgment* he brought the Friar's fulminations into the Vatican.

On Botticelli this saturnine influence was almost fatal. His conversion demoralized him. The plump esthete, whose gluttony was the delight of Lorenzo, was dazed by self-denial; he moped and neglected his affairs; and in reforming he almost ruined himself. He recovered and re-adjusted his art. But his mystic anemia grew parched, he painted the Christian Venus with an arid continence; and he labored his grace to make it grim. The pensive faces of his adolescents, the wistful chastity of his women, wan with an anxious austerity, were subtly and inwardly transformed. His allegories became abstruse and involved; and their composition, full of strained movement and studied vehemence, was arrested by a cramping *rigor mortis*. He too illustrated the visions of the Friar. In his *Crucifixion* he introduced the famous Black Cross; and toward the end of his life he appended to his pictures curious explanations couched in an Apocalyptic abracadabra. The *Nativity* was dated ' in the half-year after the first year of the loosing of the Devil, in accordance with the fulfilment of the eleventh chapter of St. John, in the second Book of the Apocalypse, when we shall see him chained and trodden down, as in this picture.'

To poetry Savonarola applied the same principles. His protests against obscene poets and the cult of antiquity caused some acrid disputes in literary circles; and to defend himself from the charge of a benighted antagonism to their art, he published an *Apology of Poetry,*

in which he elucidated his ideas. "I have never intended to condemn the art of poetry but only the abuses which many make of it. . . . Some would restrict it entirely to its form; but they are greatly in error; the essence of poetry lies in its thought, its philosophy, without which there is no true poet. . . . And because our spirit takes sovereign delight in songs and harmonies, the ancients invented the metrical measure, to impel men more nimbly to virtue. . . . What profit indeed is there in that eloquence unless it attains its purpose? What boots the vessel, painted and adorned, if it labor in the billows and never reaches port, if, on the contrary, it carries men further and further from it? O happy advantage for the soul, forsooth, to tickle the ear of the people, to tender divine praise to oneself, to cite the philosophers with rounded mouth, to sing with vain modulations the lay of the poets, and to forsake the gospel of Christ or remember it but rarely! " As for the servile idolatry of the ancients, he flayed it with withering common sense as a pernicious fad. " There is a false type of pretended poets who can do nothing but run after the Greeks and the Romans, repeating their ideas; imitating the form and the metre; invoking their very gods, as if they were not men like ourselves and had not our reason. And this is not only a false form of poetry, but a pernicious pest to youth. . . . And what shall we say, when even the ancients condemn such poets? Was it not Plato himself, whom everyone vaunts to

the skies to-day, who advocated a law to banish from the city those poets who, with the example and authority of noxious gods and the blandishments of foul verses, filled everyone with shameful lusts and moral devastation? What are our Christian princes doing to-day? Why do they neglect these evils? Why not publish a law to banish from the city not only the false poets themselves, but also their books and those of the ancients, who discourse of fallacious matters and praise the false gods? Happy would we be, if all such books were destroyed, and only those remained which invited men to virtue! " He devoted a sermon to the *Morgante* of Luigi Pulci, a mock-epic which satirized chivalry and, in some passages, religion; and another to those who accepted the Bible for the beauty of its poetry and not for its substance. But his injunctions produced little effect, though they raised up some popular poets, who composed canticles and hymns for his followers.

To the philosophers and Humanists he gave but a coasting welcome. In that sophisticated world he made little headway, though two of its luminaries had seen the light and had been buried in the Dominican habit — Pico della Mirandola and Politian. A third — Marsilio Ficino — hovered, half-fascinated, half-alarmed, on the outskirts, but he clung to his life-long hope of reconciling Platonic and Christian mysticism. For such forlorn hopes Savonarola had only a gesture of impatience. He was versed in the classics and had tasted their vanity.

" What is your Aristotle worth, if he can not even prove the existence of the soul? " he exclaimed. And as for the divine Plato — " a simple old woman knows more of the faith." In that world of enlightened, rational spirits, unblessed and uncursed with the lust of the inaccessible, so smoothly impermeable, so difficult to inflame with his mystic afflatus and emotional conviction, he met with the passive resistance of that obdurate mass of humanity which defeated him still. For them other methods were necessary — intimidation and force. But he moved on undaunted, for the times were propitious. Afflictions were fastening upon Florence.

# VIII

# *The Excommunication*

## I

EVER since the revolution the Government had been in financial straits. Commerce and industry had been arrested by the invasion and the unsettled political conditions which followed it; the indemnity to the French, the restriction of its revenues, and its concessions to economic distress, had drained its resources; and credit had sunk so low that public bonds were deflated to a tenth of their value. Attempts to levy new loans produced strikes; appeals to Florentines residing abroad proved unsuccessful; and it was faced with constantly increasing demands. Famine broke out in the country, where the incessant rains flooded the fields and ruined the crops, and hordes of peasants poured into Florence, where an old law banishing them as foreigners was repealed and they were received, under the new dispensation, as public charges. Amid this congestion the pest appeared, and a venereal disease left by the French added to its ravages. An atmosphere of settled gloom pervaded

the city, and in the summer of 1496 exhaustion and discouragement reached their low ebb.

Then a new cloud appeared on the horizon. The campaign against Pisa had been going from bad to worse. The soldiers were unpaid and unfed; some of their captains deserted to the enemy; and the enemy, growing bolder, carried its sallies further and further and threatened at last to cut off Leghorn, the lungs of the Republic on the sea and the port through which shipments of grain reached it from abroad. New expenditures had to be made for the army; and meanwhile new aid was pouring into Pisa from the League. The Venetians sent money and their choice Stradiots; the Pope sent men under his son, the Duke of Gandia, accompanied by Piero de' Medici; and Ludovico Sforza was not behindhand. The Government, in despair, appealed to Charles for aid; they sent letters and envoys and — pets: two of the Republican lions were shipped on muleback to France. Charles promised and procrastinated, and there the matter ended. Then he began to talk of a new invasion. The hopes, so often deceived, revived; and also the alarm of the League. To offset the peril, Maximilian of Austria was invited — and hired — to descend into Italy. Florence was urged once more to enter the League, and once more, under the influence of the Frateschi, she held out.

The talk of the French invasion remained talk and nothing more; but in September Maximilian crossed the

Alps, and the main object of his arms became a punitive expedition against Florence. In the first days of October he entered Pisa, where he was received with jubilation; the statue of the Paladin was struck from its pedestal and replaced with his own; and with four thousand Milanese, Venetian, and Imperial troops he proceeded to the siege of Leghorn, which was blockaded at sea by a Venetian fleet. With this strangle-hold on its one artery, Florence was thrown into panic and confusion. The Arrabbiati exploited the situation, openly denouncing the policy of the Government, counselling its overthrow and surrender to the League. Ludovico seconded their efforts by circulating among his allies forged letters, purporting to have been written by the Friar to France; but the forgery was discovered, and the Duke of Ferrara warned Savonarola against ' the meshes which are flung far to bring the fish to shore.' But there was no need to resort to such crude artifices; the unforged facts were a sufficient indictment of the fatal French policy. The Government, no longer knowing where to turn, had resort to public prayers and religious processions to calm the popular agitation. The miraculous image of the Madonna dell' Impruneta, to which appeal was traditionally made in adversity, was brought into the city, and Savonarola, after four months' retirement, returned to the pulpit, at the request of the Signoria. " I should not be speaking," he said, " but I come to obey the Signoria and to invite you once more to repentance." He drove in

the moral of affliction up to the hilt. " Are you clear? Are you clear? Of what are you clear? That the time of tribulation is at hand? that you are combating against Christ? . . . Are you clear that you will suffer, unless you reform your life? Vice flourishes as before; men gamble, men curse, and you draw the scourge on your heads. Make this procession, it will be useful; and if you turn to God, I am certain you will find favor, and you will need to fear no one. . . . But you place your faith in men; you still expect help from that King who never comes, and who already has been punished, as we promised; but I tell you, *Cursed be he who places his hope in man.*" With that disillusioned cry, he turned to practical counsels. " First of all, you must return to God; then you must abandon all thought of changing the Government or surrendering; you must help yourselves by all human means; you must lend the City all the money you can, and lend it gratis. And finally I say to you: unite and leave your dissensions. And if you make a real union, listen to what I say: I pledge my cloth that we will rout our enemies." As it happened, while the procession circled the city, a messenger rode into the crowd with news that five shiploads of grain and men from France had slipped through the blockade and reached Leghorn. There was an outburst of wild jubilation; the bells stormed the skies, the price of corn came down; thanksgivings rose from the churches; and the catastrophe was for the moment averted. But the Friar was less

impressed by the miracle. " You must not let yourselves go so easily to joy and discouragement," he said in his next sermon, " You must not abandon human precautions; you must prepare more than ever for war." It was All Souls' Day, and he preached on the art of dying well. " We live in this world, O my brothers, only to learn how to die." He urged them to hold that thought ever before them, to relinquish it never; and he poured all his sombre eloquence into impressing upon them the vanity and transitoriness of life.

For this was the propitious condition he required for reform; and he profited by the accumulation of war, pest, famine, poverty, and physical depression, to push it. He urged the Government to enforce the edicts against vice; and some attempts were made to put prohibition into practice. The taverns were closed; the races were suppressed; gamblers were threatened with the rack. Prostitutes were rounded up, escorted to the Palace to the sound of the trumpet, and driven from the city. Women who appeared in public immodestly or extravagantly dressed were subject to whipping and, on a repetition of the offense, to imprisonment. The sumptuary laws reduced the doweries of patricians to five hundred ducats. Dancing was forbidden, even in the country, where it was the only recreation; for ' it was not a time for dancing and singing, but for weeping and penance.' Fasting was practised so strictly and assiduously that the tax on the butchers' trades had to be abated;

FROM THE HOMERI MINIATURE

*Piero de' Medici*

the luxury trades went into bankruptcy. On Sundays and Saints' Days all shops, with the exception of two or three apothecary stores, were shut. A season of never-ending Lent set in, for indeed why should it ever end? Was not life a long preparation for death? The Government lent its authority to the movement; economy was a public necessity. Privation and compulsion throttled the city in a double grip, and the virtues of necessity seized it with a vice-like stringency. The salutary emergency populated the city with penants; and the meaning of life began at last to penetrate its obdurate heart. "We live, O my brothers, only to learn how to die."

But the exploitation of despair works both ways. The lust of life, repressed in some, grew more reckless in others. A reaction of fierce vitality set in, and the factions, already so sharply marshalled on political lines, were exasperated by the rigors of moral coercion. As the State took on a more and more theocratic color, the enormous fallacy of identifying religious and political issues grew increasingly apparent; their confusion heightened, in the hour in which the Friar exhorted the city to union, the virulence of its discords.

## II

For the past ten months the Vatican had remained inactive. The Arrabbiati, however, continued a steady

campaign of instigation and protest. The sermons of the Friar were forwarded to Rome. The Pope found them indigestible and could not bring himself to read them; but from the reports of those to whom he submitted them he gleaned enough to give him alarm. The soundness of his doctrine, the probity of his character, the nobility of his purposes, only made him more dangerous: for they gave a terrible authority to his misguided zeal. And misguided it was; others might describe it more harshly; but Alexander preferred to put the milder construction upon it. He gave him every benefit of the doubt, he recognized his honest intentions; but he could not deny that the political role which he was playing was improper and detrimental to the interest of religion. To make the Constitution of Florence an article of faith, to keep the public in continual commotion with his prophecies, was to abuse of his ministry; and to use his political prestige to hold Florence out of the League was in the highest degree unpatrotic and visionary. These were the points which pre-occupied him. As for his fulminations against Rome, he let them pass. He agreed with them — conditions were deplorable; he understood his indignation, though he did not share it. That he could hardly be expected to do; his official responsibility would not permit it; those conditions were essential to the functioning of the great ecclesiastical machine. Besides, Alexander had nothing of the reformer in his make-up. He was the essence of concilia-

tion; and he found it easy to reconcile the demands of God and those of the world by keeping them rigidly apart. What else was possible? It was the secret of the Catholic spirit to be accommodating and not to exact the impossible. Neither in his public nor his private life did Alexander exact the impossible of others or himself. There were certain demands that had to be met. Money was one of them; women were another; these were needs to which churchmen, like others, were heir. He could not consistently deny to them what he required himself. And his needs of both were insatiable. With his ambitions and his temperament, he was grasping of the one and the other; and where would he be, if he denied himself — above all, of women? As it was, he was subject to fainting spells; and with the hot blood coursing in his veins, with the bovine virility suddenly stunning his brain, continence would be a calamity. When it was pointed out to him that the Friar's arraignment of Rome, couched though it was in general and impersonal terms, was undoubtedly aimed at him, he was not unduly perturbed. These were small matters; and he had the virtue of his defects — he was tolerant — even of virtue. But unquestionably the man was overzealous; there was nothing so mischievous as immoderate virtue. He required tempering, the guidance of a firm, judicious, and sympathetic hand.

In November, in the midst of his activity, Savonarola received a Brief from Rome, which abolished his auton-

omy. A new Tusco-Roman Congregation was created, placing San Marco under the jurisdiction of a vicar to be appointed by the Cardinal Protector of Naples. Alexander, who had learned by experience the difficulty of handling him, had acted with consummate tact. He met his objections to the Lombard Congregation; he made no attempt to unite the hostile convents; he gave him every guarantee of equity and good will by the nomination of his patron; and he held out the flattering intimation that he would now have the opportunity of extending his reform to the Roman States. But the balm and the blandishments were wasted. The Friar made no direct reply; instead, he appealed to the public in an *Apology for the Congregation of San Marco*. He declared the proposed union 'impossible, unreasonable, and injurious.' But his reasons were thin. He protested, somewhat surprisingly, that to obey depended 'not on his authority alone but on the consent of 250 friars, who have all written unanimously to the Pope against it.' He claimed that the discipline would be corrupted, with especial detriment to the young, who formed the majority of his flock. "If the other friars do not need to be reformed, why are they adjoined to us? If they are united with us, in order to be reformed, we have so many untried youths that we can hardly handle them ourselves. The union would only produce confusion and disorder for all, and for us in particular." These were, of course, but pretexts; he divined the intention of the

new Congregation; and he was determined not to surrender his independence. Later, he put it more plainly. " First, they wished to unite us with the Lombards, from whom they had parted us, and now with the Romans; first, one way, then another. I call this a chess game in which, to defend the king, you play him out of one position and back to it: the circumventions of malice are plain." Accordingly, he determined to resist, ' without fear of threats or excommunications, but braving death rather than to submit to what would be poison and damnation to the soul.' " When the commands of one's superiors are repugnant to conscience," he concluded, " one must first resist and humbly correct them, which we have done; but if that does not suffice, then one must do like St. Paul, *qui coram omnibus restitit in faciem Petri.*" The Holy Father found these strong words to stomach but to resort to stronger measures, while Florence was so hard pressed, might have produced serious consequences; the situation was in his favor; and he awaited its developments.

They took an unforeseen turn. The November winds, growing to a gale, drove the Venetian fleet on the rocks, and Maximilian barely escaped with his life. Dripping and discouraged, he raised the siege, and hurried home with an unresting haste. The delivery of Leghorn was greeted in Florence with a chorus of thanksgiving and relief which Savonarola led. " O Lord, this is your city; You have chosen it; You have enlightened it with the

good life; You have infused the light and the faith of Your spirit into this people. After the blessings of the spirit, You have granted it temporal blessings as well! " But the winter which now set in was one of deepening discontent. Want and disease stalked the streets and crowded the hospitals. The famished fell in their tracks; there were food riots and bread-lines; the Grain Market was repeatedly looted; and when the Commune distributed corn, the crush was so great that women were suffocated. To alleviate this distress the Government reduced its salaries for a year; a forced loan was raised from the clergy; and the reform of the Decima was modified and transformed into a progressive tax. At the same time another of the initial institutions of the Republic was modified. The Grand Council was enlarged; the age-limit was lowered from twenty-nine to twenty-four years, and the influx of youth brought in a large representation from the Arrabbiati, who counted their most turbulent supporters among the young men of the city. Savonarola strenuously opposed this measure. " Ungrateful people! " he thundered. " God has given you this Grand Council and you want to destroy it by bringing into it the enemies of the country. That was not my intention. In the beginning, I allowed everyone to enter, because liberty was then young, and it was necessary to experiment; but I did not do so to give the wicked a refuge, as you have done now. *Magnifici Signori,* I tell you that you must keep an eye to this Coun-

cil, and limit and restrict it, and see whether many who are there should be there." But the measure was carried by one of his most ardent partisans, Francesco Valori, in order to silence the complaints that the State was developing into a theocracy and a dictatorship.

And those complaints required silencing. The long period over which the Frateschi had controlled the Government, combined with the rigors of Prohibition, lent color to the invectives of the Arrabbiati against 'the tyranny of the Friar.' In the gloom of the city, oppressed with famine, pest, poverty, and Blue Laws, they made headway. The reaction was gathering, underground, and with the return of Carnival (1497) they prepared to test the popular temper by reviving the old sports and relieving the general depression with a reminder of the carefree bygone days. But Savonarola forestalled the manoeuvre with a demonstration of his own. For weeks beforehand, his boys canvassed the city from door to door, collecting vanities — masks, wigs, obscene pictures and books, playing-boards, mirrors, nude statues, copies of Boccaccio and Pulci's *Morgante* — for which they made payment with prayers. These trophies were heaped on a wooden pyramid in the Piazza, filled with inflammable materials, and surmounted with a diabolical figure of King Carnival. On the appointed day, the children, preceded by an Infant Jesus and followed by a pious crowd, filed into the square and took up their positions under the Palace and the Loggia. The

Arrabbiati made some attempts to heckle the celebration, but the expected clash did not break out, and their jeers were drowned by the hymns which the children exchanged, in antiphonal industry, from side to side of the Piazza. At a given signal, the trumpets rang out; the bells pealed; a dense acrid smoke rose from the pyre; and amid an overpowering roar of pious triumph, the sins of the city shot up in flame.

## III

The Burning of the Vanities is responsible for the odium of vandalism with which the name of Savonarola has ever since been associated. That scene, like a lurid lithograph, has colored the popular picture of the great Catholic Puritan; and the imagination of posterity has swollen it out of all proportion to its importance. His contemporaries were not scandalized by it. The monetary value of the Vanities was considerable. When the celebration was repeated, a Venetian Jew offered to buy them in for 120,000 scudi: an offer which was indignantly rejected; his effigy was burned and he was forced to watch the holocaust in vicarious agony. But their artistic value was slight. Beyond some copies of Boccaccio and the *Morgante* and possibly a sheaf of nude drawings by Fra Bartolommeo, nothing of consequence is known to have perished; and the fact that in so art-loving a city no outcry was raised — above all, by the

artists themselves — goes far to prove it. Amid all the grievances held against Savonarola by his enemies, the charge of vandalism finds little or no place. And, as if to offset it, he rendered the cause of learning a conspicuous service soon after by the purchase of a priceless collection of ancient codices and manuscripts from the Medici Library, which the Government was offering for sale. To save it from dispersal and purchase abroad, he sold some property remaining to San Marco and raised 2000 florins with which he secured a lien on it for a year. At the end of that period, he completed the purchase; the collection was installed in San Marco and thrown open to the public; and it rests to-day in the Laurentian Library.

Nevertheless, the Burning of the Vanities had its sinister side. Its fanaticism was deplored by his own sympathizers who regretted that the booty had not been sold for charity. And it was as a symptom of growing strain and exasperation that its fury was solemnly ominous. It was a tell-tale excess, prompted by a deepening sense of impotence. With the passing of the emergency, the piety of the public relaxed, and he foresaw the inevitable reaction. He urged the magistrates to enforce the edicts against vice; but they were reluctant to add to the general discontent. He redoubled his exhortations, his appeals, his intimidations; but he was forced himself to recognize their futility. Humanity held its way: " it is as difficult to stem this tide," he lamented,

" as to curb the course of the waters." With weary hopelessness he confessed his failure to the public: " You are like the crow in the belfry; when it first hears the bell, it takes fright and flies; but when it has grown used to it, ring as you will, it sits on the bell and will not stir." It was useless; he had dinned his mission too long into ears which had grown dulled with it; and he exclaimed hollowly against life as it is, as it was, as it ever would be.

But the deepest impulse of his nature rose in contradiction; choler and melancholy surged up within him; he snatched at every expedient to rally the faithful, to dazzle the impious with false fire. Failure, opposition, persecution, only excited his obstinacy; and the consequences of the situation he had created, the collusion of domestic enmity and Roman ire, forced him into desperate belligerency. He was trapped in his own handiwork; and he had more than ever the presentiment that he was doomed. But before the end came, he worked with feverish intensity to accomplish what yet he could.

Alexander, checkmated with the Tusco-Roman Congregation, was urged by the extremists in the Vatican to launch the excommunication; nothing less, they insisted, would reduce the recalcitrant Friar to silence. The rumor reached Florence, and Savonarola answered it. " Many of you foresee an excommunication," he told his congregation. " Bring it in, bring in your excom-

munication on a spear-head, and fling wide the gates. I shall answer it, and if I do not surprise you, you may say what you will." But the ban was not forthcoming. Alexander was loath to resort to violence; his temper was growing short, however. In March he made a secret offer to the Government to restore Pisa in return for its adherence to the League. The envoy sent by the Ten to discuss it with him, found His Holiness in a sullen and uncertain mood. Alluding to the French invasion, he said with emphasis, " God forgive the author of it! It has been the source of all the troubles of Italy and your State knows it, since it was dismembered by the loss of Pisa." When this reflection had sunk in, he developed it. " It would be far worse, if they were to return; and that is why we are doing everything, as the Lord knows, to unify Italy." He paused and studied his man. " Above all, we rely on your perspicacity and foresight. With great difficulty we have persuaded the League to restore Pisa to you, provided you side with us and behave like good Italians, leaving the French in France. But we must have guarantees and securities of your good faith, and not mere words." But words, and very non-committal words, were all the envoy was prepared to offer; whereupon the Pope grew impatient. " Master Secretary, you are as stout as we, but by your leave, you bring a lean commission, and if you have no more to say, you may retire." Then, suddenly, the corpulent figure quivered with suppressed indignation; and he

breathed huskily. " We know that all this comes of your faith in your windbag, whom you suffer to insult and upbraid us, though we sit *licet immeriti,* in this Holy Seat." The envoy attempted to remonstrate, but the Pope, working himself up into a towering rage, silenced him.

The Government, learning that the Venetians were opposed to the cession of Pisa and that the Pope was promising more than he could perform, rejected the offer; but for a moment the bait had tempted them. The ambassador in Rome warned them, however, that ' the anger against Savonarola is growing on every side here, so that it is impossible to defend him. And it is necessary to keep an eye on Piero de' Medici, who may very well take advantage of the gravity of present conditions, which are highly favorable to him.'

The warning reached Florence none too soon. For Piero de' Medici his restoration had come to mean his rehabilitation as a man. Since the failure of his last attempt he had sunk lower and lower. Every court in Italy had been closed against his importunacy and his misfortune. Then began a long decline. Penniless and embittered, he retired to his brother's house in Rome, living on his bounty, till it too wore thin. Their revenues curtailed, their shutters drawn, the brothers touched the low ebb of their fortunes. The great establishment in which Lorenzo had set up the Cardinal was bankrupt; everything was mortgaged — the plate, the arras, the

choice antiques; for every florin that entered the house half went out in interest. In these straits tempers grew short and friction set in. There were painful scenes which shocked the household. Piero abused his brother in language which would have stung a menial; his ingratitude and brutality alienated the last vestiges of sympathy. From an unfortunate exile he became a public bore and a domestic pest. Lounging in bed till midday, he called for the menu; if it satisfied him, he ate at home; if not, he touched his friends. Of friends he had few; his need completed his unpopularity; but he found a lonely substitute in debauchery. The Palazzo Sanseverino spread a liberal board, and in the questionable society which gathered there he still found a seat. His prowess at table was notorious. A fowl and some few side dishes were little; he drank deep: " in this matter of the mouth," a companion remarked, " he showed diligence." The afternoon was spent *in camera,* with courtesans of both sexes. For supper — the one full meal of the day — he favored the Cardinal, where a forlorn little group sat down to a frugal table to drink to the restoration. Then, all the rankling anger within him welled up; his liver burned; he drew up vindictive lists of proscription, and swore to give Florence a taste of his temper beside which the wholesale slaughters and banishments of '34 would pale; and the tirade over, he flung out of the house and ended the night swaying over the gaming-tables. Among all the derelicts who thronged

the dives of Rome, none was more forsaken than Piero. His temper grew terrible; only women could put up with him. He insulted his friends and his family; he maltreated and murdered his underlings; but his wife still clung to him, and for her sake some yet pitied him. One day, the Cardinal fell sick and his life was despaired of. It became a question then for his brother, not of a dominion, but of the next meal. The question haunted the whole household; every eye hung on that bland, full-moon face, propped on its paler pillows; and hungriest of all, those of a wretched friar of San Marco, who had helped the Cardinal out of Florence and who had been brought to Rome to live the life of a sacred obligation. Fed at long intervals in the scullery, his presence was a grim memento of the grandeur and misery of the house of Medici; and when he appeared, their ghosts walked with him. He knelt now, with the others, about the great bedstead; and Piero, seeing in that abject fate the image of his own, felt his pride rebel. He determined to try his fortune once more. The moment was propitious; he received encouragement from Florence and was promised that he had only to appear for the city to rise. His wife not only pawned her jewels, she forged, to raise money; his family, anxious to get rid of him, mustered a small force of men; and on April 27 he appeared before Florence. Had there been any confidence in the city or in himself, he might well have succeeded; but there was neither. The news of his approach foreran

PINTURICCHIO

*Pope Alexander VI*

him; the gates were closed; and he waited all day, in a driving downpour of rain, for them to open. When nothing happened, his old irresolution awoke, his inveterate sense of misfortune demoralized him, and he turned his face back to the dark. The next morning he and his nightriders were jingling back to Rome; the truant returned to obscurity.

In Florence there was a momentary flurry, which quickly subsided. But the jolt was sufficient to precipitate the seething unrest of the city into ferment. All those suspected of Medicean sympathies were relentlessly pursued, and the Arrabbiati baited the Bigi with open violence; then, by a natural development, they turned against the Frateschi. The Arrabbiati had now gained a foothold in the government; in the Signoria for May and June they were powerfully represented; and their young men, taking advantage of official protection, threatened a demonstration against the Friar for Ascension Day (May 4). There were rumors of plots to blow up the pulpit; wagers were exchanged that he would or would not preach; and his friends urged him not to tempt Providence. All his belligerency, his courage, and his despair rose to the challenge. " I can not," he protested, " I can not, for fear of men, leave this people without preaching on the day the Lord appointed for His disciples to preach the faith through the world." Heroic, his courage was yet human: it was not unmixed with trepidation and with a quick defensive calculation.

It was more dangerous to fall back than to go on: his credit would not permit him to yield. And his credit was his life. " I can not live without preaching," he said repeatedly. The intoxication that ascended through all his veins when he stood in the pulpit, the center of all eyes, the arbiter of multitudes, when, as he wrote, " all eyes were turned toward me, and my hearers hung on my words so intently that they might have been mistaken for statues " — that intoxication was his life-blood: he could not forfeit it. To prove his courage to the world and to himself was more imperative than danger and death. He believed also that the menace was mere bluster; and he agreed with Valori, who urged him on, that it would be both shameful and impolitic to yield.

On the night preceding the sermon the *Compagnacci,* a group of young Arrabbiati, broke into the church, defiled the pulpit with excrement, planted nails on the balustrade, and draped it with a dead ass. When he reached the church, the offense had been removed by his followers; but he faced a crowd which the first agitation would convert into a mob. It affected him ambiguously. He began with a challenge. " The wicked think to prevent me from preaching to-day. But they know that I have never failed in my duty for fear of man. No man on earth, great or small, can boast that he has prevented me from fulfilling my office. I am ready to stake my life on it." But under the terrible pressure, his words

bent; and his exhortations to the faithful to hold fast, colored by the general discouragement, took a turn so disheartening as to defeat their purpose. " You lose heart for little; you are heavy, when you should rejoice — " and he offered them the consolation of further afflictions. " Now comes the time of tribulations; there will be wars of the sword, of excommunications, of martyrdom; the times of trial are come. It is the will of God that I should be the first to suffer; I have already predicted that I shall know a great ingratitude and that the tepid will treat me like the brothers of Joseph, who sold him to the merchants out of Egypt. They claim that I am no prophet, but they do everything to realize my prophecies. I repeat that Italy will be devastated by barbarians; when they make peace among themselves, destruction upon destruction will fall on the perversity of Italy." Then he turned to his enemies. " Now for the wicked." He drew a deep breath. " O Lord, be not wroth with them; forgive them, convert them, for they know not what they do. You think, O wicked, that you are fighting the Friar: you are combating the Lord. I do not fight out of hatred of you but because of love for the Lord. You say that I sow discord; but even the Lord came to bring war among men. Why do you not return to virtue? Then there would be peace. — O Friar, you should not preach, the Signoria has forbidden you. — That is not true; and I must not leave preaching for fear of men or at their command; I shall be silent only when

my preaching does harm, only when I am afraid that it may cause a disturbance." At that moment the Compagnacci took their cue. One of their number flung an alms-box on the floor, and the sound, like an explosion, threw the congregation into a panic. There was a rush for the doors; the Compagnacci beat on the benches; shouts and cries resounded; while Savonarola, high above the tumult, cried, " Ah, the wicked will not hear. . . . Wait, wait, have patience," and raising a crucifix, " Have faith in this," he shouted, " and fear nothing." As at a preconcerted signal, his followers flung up their hands with the little red cross which was their badge; they surged about the pulpit; and those who were armed drew, while others hurried home for weapons. A half-hour later, he was escorted to San Marco under a heavy guard.

To prevent a repetition of these outbreaks, the Signoria closed all the churches, on the pretext of the plague. The fury of partisanship had reached such a pitch, however, that Somenzi, in his reports to Milan, compared it to the days of the Guelfs and Ghibellines; and a non-partisan Commission was appointed to pacify the city. This became the dominating preoccupation of the authorities, and Savonarola, realizing the danger of envenoming the issue, declared in a pastoral letter to the faithful that he ' had decided to imitate the example of the Lord, who many times submitted to the ire of the Scribes and Pharisees, and would abstain from

preaching.' Three weeks later, the Arrabbiati proposed his banishment; but the bill was thrown out as inflammatory. They then wrote to Rome, urging the publication of the excommunication; and, as the ambassador wrote, " finding the material well disposed, the medicine took effect."

Savonarola felt it coming and made a belated attempt to avert it. " Wherefore," he wrote to the Pope, " is my Lord wroth with his servant? " In a letter of supremely bland appeal, he laid the burden of blame on the calumnies of his enemies and invited the Holy Father to read his sermons which, he insisted confidently, would give them the lie. He declared that his criticisms were general, that he had never attacked any man in particular, much less the Vicar of Christ, and that he professed absolute obedience to the See. The letter made an excellent impression on the Pope; but it arrived too late. The ban had already been dispatched. Entrusted to a certain Camerino, who was a bitter enemy of the Friar, and who feared for his life if he entered Florence, it was delayed on the way, however; and the Pope had time to repent it. The Cardinal of Naples, in discussing it with the Florentine ambassador, explained that it had been kept a close secret and that His Holiness ' regretted having sent it and especially by Camerino when he learned that he was an enemy of the city and of Fra Girolamo '; and added that ' if Camerino were wise, he would never arrive.' Alexander, in fact, veering from

mood to mood, had yielded to complaisance and allowed himself to be ' circumvented.' His natural inclination, as the Cardinal interpreted it, was to employ milder methods; but something must be done to bring the Friar to obedience, ' for he had brought discord into the city.' At this the Ambassador protested, laying the blame on his enemies; but the Cardinal insisted that ' only yesterday Cardinal de' Medici had spoken highly of Savonarola, and Piero made no complaint against him.' The Ambassador was convinced, however, that they were at the bottom of it and that ' its real author was none other than his Paternity, Fra Mariano da Gennazzano.' In this confusion of plotting, complaisance, irresponsibility, and malignance, the supreme ecclesiastical censure was launched.

In its wording and tone it reflected its furtive and composite authorship. " From several persons worthy of trust," the Pope was made to write, " we have learned how a certain Fra Girolamo Savonarola, at present, so it is said, Vicar of San Marco in Florence, has disseminated pernicious doctrine, to the scandal and detriment of simple souls." It then went on to rehearse the history of the Congregations, alluding to the ' too great benignity with which His Holiness had accepted his excuses,' and asserting that, since he had ' persisted in his obstinacy,' he had incurred, *ipso facto,* the penalty. " Wherefore we command you that, in the presence of the people, you declare the said Fra Girolamo excommunicate and

so to be regarded by everyone, because he has not obeyed our Apostolic admonitions and commands. And under the same penalty, everyone to be enjoined from aiding, frequenting, or praising him, either in words or acts, as excommunicate and suspect of heresy." The Brief was cast in the unaccustomed form of a circular letter addressed to the Friars of several Florentine convents, as if the Pope had purposely avoided the more solemn and universal form.

Camerino was inspired with the wisdom never to arrive, but from Siena he forwarded it by a friar; and a month after its indictment (March 18) it was published in the six major churches of Florence, amid all the solemn accompaniments of spiritual extinction. The bells tolled; the eerie tapers burned; and when the sentence had been pronounced, their flames were strangled, darkness fell, and in memorial silence the suspended soul was consigned to perdition.

## IV

At once, the reaction broke out. It had been gathering ever since the election of the Arrabbiati to the Signoria, and for the past month the city had been reverting to its normal habits. The taverns re-opened; the *Palio* of San Barnabo was run; gambling was resumed, the Signori themselves setting the example; and to the protests of the pious they replied, with a shrug, "Let us cheer up

the people a little. Are we all to become monks?" At the notorious *Frascato,* braggart dicers and buxom lasses pocketed their profits, and the laxative tickle of the flute thrilled to the pounding feet of the dancers. The brothel and the confessional resumed their mutual trade. Broadsides and scurrilous songs lampooned the Friar; a procession of his boys was dispersed and robbed of its crosses; and the Compagnacci circled the convent at night, serenading him with jeers and stones.

Within all was silence; but in the Prior's cell a feverish activity was forward. Two days later his reply appeared in the form of an *Epistle against the Surreptitious Excommunication.* Stigmatizing it with that inspired epithet, he declared it 'invalid before God and men, because it is prompted by reasons and charges falsely invented by our enemies.' This was, however, to confuse the issue which, as the Brief expressly stated, was his insubordination in rejecting the Tusco-Roman Congregation. But how rarely, in a crisis, do men recognize the truth! The instinct of self-preservation, in the most scrupulous, takes the most stubborn forms: he could not afford to be wrong or to give the devil his due. For it was indeed a matter of the salvation of all he had lived and fought for. Father Sardi, who loved and knew him well, declared that he did in fact dread the excommunication but that he dared not show it, lest he forfeit his credit. The closing of the churches made it impossible for him to preach, but he continued to celebrate Mass in San

Marco, and in a second letter to the public he rallied ' the pusillanimous, who believe that the Pontiff is well-nigh a God with power over the Heavens and the Earth.' To submit to an unjust sentence he declared roundly, was ' asinine patience and foolish and hare-like timidity.' He threw out a veiled hint of appealing to a General Council. " To avoid an unjust excommunication, it is no sin in a Christian to resort to the secular power; for such sentences are sheer violence, and natural right teaches us to meet force with force."

But at that moment the situation suddenly took an unforeseen, a providential turn.

# IX

# *Disintegration*

## I

ON June 19th, the morrow of the excommunication, the first reports reached Florence of a tragedy in the Vatican, which the Frateschi immediately exploited as its retribution. The Duke of Gandia, Alexander's eldest son, had been murdered; the body, retrieved from the Tiber where the scum of the city was dumped into it, bore the marks of an atrocious vengeance. The Pope was prostrated; as the corpse was borne to its burial, the crowd gathered on the bridge of Sant' Angelo heard his cries piercing the night. For three days he lay, incapable of food, sleep, or consolation: the yellow Tiber closed over his pillow. When at last he emerged, he was a changed man. In the Consistory on the 19th he alluded to his irregular life, recognized a divine visitation in his bereavement, vowed to know ' neither flesh nor blood nor kin nor affection,' and appointed a Commission of six Cardinals for the reform of the Church. Well might the Frateschi exclaim; well might they point to the reform

of the Church by the sword; but the end was not yet. An investigation was begun. Spreading like wildfire into every recess of Rome, it startled so many suspects from their lairs, uncovered so many corruptions, and threw the whole Court into such commotion, that the Pope promptly quashed it. But the mischief was done: rumor completed the scandal, and the revelations which ensued furnished a lurid confirmation of the conditions against which Savonarola inveighed. Suspicion settled in turn on the Orsini, on Cardinal Sforza, on Giovanni Sforza, the Pope's son-in-law, and on his sons Giuffredo and Cesare. Each in turn the Pope exonerated; but what he could not lay were the motives imputed to each for the crime, a relentless exposure which culminated, with the incrimination of Cesare, in the insinuation of incestuous jealousy.

Long before it reached this climax, Alexander had reached the limits of suffering. Desperately as he suppressed the damning investigation, he was himself overpowered by a sense of supernatural retribution. The first paroxysms of anguish passed and were succeeded by stupefied apathy. The great body drooped in its chair, stunned in its bowels; the bovine eyes brooded insatiably on their inward vision. They plumbed the Tiber, a murmuring sewer of scum, closing over his first-born . . . *ut stercus,* he muttered, *ut stercus:* like smut. They closed, and under the bald lids he pursued his own investigations. They led to but one conclusion, and he

succumbed to it utterly. In his flesh he had sinned, in his flesh he was smitten. The collapse of the sensualist was a bottomless, a maudlin contrition. There were rumors of abdication; but life was more ruthless; he rallied; his indomitable vitality reasserted itself; and he returned to work. A change, however, had come over him. The lax mouth, the veiled, weary, wistfully cynical eyes betrayed, through the slackening flesh, the softening brain.

In July a new Signoria, favorable to the Friar, was elected in Florence. It profited by the chastened mood of His Holiness to press for a repeal of the excommunication. The prospects seemed promising. The Cardinal of Perugia reported that the Pope had admitted that the excommunication had been published at an inopportune moment and against his better judgment. A vigorous campaign was begun, and Savonarola contributed a letter of condolence to the Pope. Taking an optimistic view of the tragedy as ' a happy summons,' he urged him to respond to it, that his grief might be turned into joy. Faith, he assured him, was the only refuge from adversity; and he implored him to look favorably on the labor of faith for which he was persecuted, ' inasmuch as the things predicted by me are all true and none who resist the Lord can enjoy peace.' " These things, Holy Father," he added, lest there be any doubt of his motive, " I write out of charity, hoping that Your Holiness may be truly comforted by God. Before long the thunders of

His Wrath will be heard, and blessed are those who have placed their faith in Him. May the Lord of all mercy console Your Holiness in your tribulations." It was a difficult letter to write; the necessity of adjusting his conscience to his charity required either an exceptional diplomatic address or a frank and unqualified expression of simple humanity; the one thing fatal to its effect was the temptation to moralize on the tragedy. On a similar occasion, six years before, at Lorenzo's deathbed, the same blind spots, the same unfeeling sense of principle, had cramped his sympathy; and on this occasion they produced much the same effect. The Pope was at first touched by the letter; but when he digested it, he alluded feelingly to the effrontery with which the Friar ' reproached him with the loss of his son.' It was one thing to accuse himself; it was another to be admonished by another; and in the depths of his humility Alexander's pride turned.

Nevertheless, when the Florentine ambassador broached the subject of the repeal, he found him well disposed: he protested to God that he meant well by the Friar. Then suddenly the wind changed. He had received a copy of the *Epistle against the Surreptitious Excommunication,* and his sense of responsibility prevailed over his sentiment. The only concession he would make was to place the case before the Commission on Reform: a solution the propriety of which would no doubt recommend itself to the reformer. And there for

the moment the matter rested. The honesty of this body was above question. Its appointment, the ambassador wrote, inspired great hopes in Rome and ' if only the Pope will persevere in his good purposes, the prediction of Fra Girolamo will be verified, that the Church is to be reformed by the sword.' On the other hand, its president was Cardinal Caraffa of Naples; and that staunch friend of former days had cooled, due to the obstinacy with which Savonarola rejected the Tusco-Roman Congregation of which he was the sponsor. A protracted struggle now began between the partisans and opponents of the Friar to influence the Curia. It was clear that if the Vatican was to be mollified a period of probation must pass and the Friar observe an attitude of extreme circumspection. The latter was the easier condition to meet. Though Savonarola celebrated Mass with his monks, he made no attempt to preach in public, out of respect, as he said, ' for the scruples of the pusillanimous,' and the Government aided him by closing the churches, on the pretext of the plague. But on the question of time it was impatient, for reasons of its own, which it made no attempt to disguise. His voice was essential to the party, and in a pre-election period the Government went so far as to appeal for a fortnight's suspension of the ban.

Alexander felt justified in attributing the whole question, therefore, to party interests, and this political pressure, while it explained the vigor with which the Gov-

ernment pushed his cause in Rome, tended to hamper its success. On religious grounds, it was already sufficiently confused, Savonarola defending his resistance as a question of conscience, and the Vatican requiring his submission as a principle of discipline, a misunderstanding serious enough in itself, without the further mischief of political complications. Their viciousness was illustrated at every turn in the negotiations. The monks of San Marco drew up an appeal to the Pope in which, testifying to the character of the Prior and their unanimous devotion to him — 'although a foreigner' — they imputed his disgrace to the machinations of Florentine faction. A duplicate of this petition was offered for subscription to the public, and some three hundred signatures were obtained from influential sympathizers. Immediately a storm broke. The Opposition took violent exception to the petition as a piece of political propaganda, a misrepresentation of the facts, and an unconstitutional initiative. A Council was called, in which the subscribers were threatened with penalties usually reserved for crimes of State, and only the determined resistance of the Frateschi and the opposition of the neutral elements who desired to pacify the city prevented their enactment.

Such incidents brought home to Savonarola the necessity of dissociating the question from political interpretations. He had long desired to retire from public life. He had, he felt, little capacity for practical politics;

he was interested only in large and general principles, whose application he left to professional politicians. He was the seed-sower; the seed was sown; and he now needed freedom for a far greater struggle. But he found it singularly difficult to extricate himself from the compromising past. San Marco was regarded as a political club; the most damaging stories of intrigue and lobbying in its cloisters circulated; it was even believed that the confessional served as a ballot-booth and that its secrets were pumped by the Prior. Such gossip was difficult to dispel. He guarded himself by an exemplary reserve; he shunned the Palace, he conducted his business by emissaries, he retired behind secretaries — but what availed such precautions? His partisans — men like Francesco Valori, Pagolantonio Soderini, Rudolfo Rudolfi, Giovanni Cambi — were always about; he was sought out by foreign ambassadors, by visiting notables, sometimes even, at night and *incognito,* by mysterious dignitaries from abroad — and who would believe that their business was not political? He was, for better or worse, a public figure, and it was in vain that he attempted to resume the monastic obscurity of the past. It was in vain that he protested against the importunacy with which he was involved in politics — of which, he exclaimed, he knew nothing — not even his monks would believe him.

For, in the convent as well, this commerce with the world had borne unwholesome fruit. The rigor of the

rule was relaxed, and the purity of the spirit impaired. His aloofness and the privileges accorded his lieutenants, Fra Domenico and Fra Silvestro, aroused resentment. Of this state of mind, a muffled undertone of small envy accompanying the momentous development of major issues, we catch an echo in the confession of one of the malcontents. As the mouthpiece of a disaffected minority whose molelike activities had been constantly suppressed, Fra Ruberto Ubaldini took satisfaction in informing the world, on the witness stand, of his martyrdom. " I considered it a cause of scandal," he explained, " that there should be three *great masters* in the house, he and Fra Domenico and Fra Silvestro, and that they should usurp all dominion and liberty and privilege, being in no wise subject, as their calling requires. But seeing that these three defined and determined everything . . . and that the others agreed to all that they did, I restrained myself, murmuring and complaining of such matters, however, both to Fra Hieronymo, to whom I denounced it as a tyranny, and to certain other friars who felt the same temptation as I did; and for this we were always kept down, and particularly I, and deprived of all opinion and credit both at home and abroad." The Prior, he admitted, pacified him, " ably, very pleasantly, alleging many reasons, and persuading me to keep quiet," and he subsided. But not for long. " These doubts returned to me, especially seeing Fra Silvestro spending the whole day in the cloisters,

gossiping with laymen, which I blamed; and again I complained with various friars and fathers; but there was no help for it in the end but to have patience. And the same was true of Fra Domenico, whom I believed to be a good man but thick-headed, and too credulous of the dreams and revelations of women and weak and foolish souls; but if you did not believe you were in perpetual martyrdom. And these three rarely took part in our common life, being constantly occupied with their own affairs, which I considered a scandal." How was he to know that a mystic bond bound those three? that in a vision Fra Silvestro had seen angels linking their hearts with a golden chain? or that death would seal their trinity? That secret, like so many others, was never told to the profane. And so the mischief grew. Fra Silvestro, for all his gadding with laymen, had nothing to tell; Fra Domenico was close-mouthed — 'Why should I speak,' he said, 'to those with whom I have no business?' Their discretion was the final affront. Monastic life was monotonous; backbiting and gossip were its only relief; and it was clear that if one sat in the Prior's cell, wrote his letters, and enjoyed his confidence, such privileges constituted an obligation to the community. Fra Nicolo of Milan, his secretary, understood it and was more accommodating; and on one occasion he let slip a most significant piece of information.

Discussing one day the insecurity and factional activity in the State caused by the short terms of office, he

ventured an opinion: the remedy lay in the creation of a Gonfalonier for a long period of years, perhaps even for life, a counterpart, as it were, of the Venetian Doge. This startling suggestion was greeted with compressed lips, and it went no further. The brothers, entrusted with a little confidence, did not betray it. A breakdown of the Republican charter for which the Friar had so stubbornly fought — a return perhaps to the Medici system? — at all events an admission of failure — was a suggestion not to be lightly broached. Had the wheel come full circle? Was this the end of the good fight? Were these the ideas at work upstairs in the Prior's little suite of cells? Savonarola had indeed entertained the idea, but he relinquished it. It was too dangerous. In Valori, childless, incorruptible — the Florentine Cato — he saw the one man capable of assuming such power; but power worked a strange alchemy in the best of men; it was too tempting — had it not tempted the Medici? The idea, nevertheless, was so sound, it corresponded so exactly to a widely felt need, that five years later it was put into practice: five years too late to help him.

That such ideas should be nursed in the convent was dangerous; that they should leak out, was more so. There were eavesdroppers, whenever he walked in the cloisters with his partisans, and though they never heard more than a devout recommendation to seek counsel of God, the spying and tattle in dark corners continued. It

was time, it was high time, that San Marco should again become a monastery. The opportunity now presented itself. With the excommunication came a welcome abatement of this intercourse with the world. Those who still frequented the convent did so at their risk: in Santo Spirito his supporters were thrown out of church. His monks were hooted on the street as ' Jews and Infidels,' and not all of them accepted persecution with the easy grace of martyrs. But now to the spiritual quarantine was added a more effective isolation. In the hot days of July the pest increased, and a general exodus took place from the city. The infection broke out in the convent, and Savonarola sent seventy of the weaker members to the country, where they were quartered in the villas of friends and relatives — an irregularity which did not escape criticism. With those that remained, he devoted himself to charity — one duty at least which was not doubtful or divided. Then at last, in the moral healing of holy ministrations and the rarefied atmosphere of death, the true spirit of sanctity returned to the cloister. The sick saved the sound by their pious example. " Our Friars die joyously," he noted with gratitude, " as if they were going to a feast." In the city the same exaltation prevailed. " The joy of the dying is marvelous: men and women, friars and laity, yield their souls, praising God." He had not labored in vain: to learn to die was to learn to live. The plague became an epidemic of faith; it was known as ' an honest plague '; and it was noted

with awe that it spared the children. For himself he refused all offers of asylum — what greater asylum could he have than this revival of faith? As the heavenward migration buoyantly continued, the eternal enemy, the mutinous will to live, was baffled, and he praised God for the plague as for a blessing. Public life came to a stand-still, faction and strife were suspended; Florence, filled with corpses and crosses, subsided. For a time he knew a reprieve from all his problems, the murmurings of his flock, the perplexities of politics, and the persecutions of Rome.

## II

But it was only a reprieve. During that last summer of his life, a moribund calm was the only symptom of his mortal decline; but the malady was at work, and no opiate could stay it. The political complications of his position slowly reasserted themselves, and they stimulated his resistance by the support which they brought him. For the next six months his followers remained in control of the Government, and every effort was made to secure the repeal. The Ambassador in Rome knew the contents of every despatch before he opened it. "Knock, cry, make every possible effort, do not give over, or spare yourself any fatigue, until you succeed." He obeyed; he spared himself no fatigue, he solicited in season and out, he toiled over the Roman cobbles, he

knocked at cavernous portals, climbed monumental stairs, slipped through felted doors, and sat for hours in cool vaulted chambers, through the long, malarial, Roman afternoons, pleading his client's cause. But he made little progress; and for an obvious reason. He had nothing to offer. Some books from the Medici Library did indeed pass through his hands into those of influential bibliophiles, and he was authorized to lay out money where it would help, but when it came to the point, he met with unfailing resistance from the same quarter. The saintly Cardinal of Siena was sympathetic; for a matter of 5000 scudi he was prepared to promise the repeal. But the Friar indignantly refused the offer. " I should consider it a far greater censure," he said, " to purchase the absolution at such a price." What could one do for such a man? He expected everything for nothing. Rome was a mart; it was all very well to despise its methods, sitting in lofty isolation in a cell in San Marco; but facts must be faced. The Friar was blind to them. It was not only such venal offers that he scorned; he declined to talk terms at all. Yet terms of some sort there must be, and those which the Vatican offered were reasonable. They involved no sacrifice of his principles; they required merely that the grounds on which the excommunication had been incurred should be removed by a formal act of submission, either by coming to Rome or by accepting the Tusco-Roman Congregation. Throughout the whole course of the negotia-

tions, however, no concession was made, no mention even, of the point at issue: the Friar plainly expected the absolution to be unconditional. At last Messer Becchi put the case squarely to the Ten: "If Your Lordships can not persuade his Paternity to consent to the union of the Congregations, or if the Signory can not give an undertaking that within two months Fra Girolamo will come to Rome, the absolution is not to be looked for. But if the City will do this, then neither the Pope nor the Cardinals are disposed to withhold it."

This was plain, and it was difficult to see on what ground the Friar could reasonably refuse such an offer. If, as Rome maintained, insubordination was the only issue, it followed that his position was untenable; and he seemed to admit it by the obstinacy with which he ignored this definition of the question and substituted his own for it. By dismissing the whole question as a subterfuge instigated by his political enemies, he not only confused the issue, however, he offered a defense which — founded or unfounded — was both arbitrary and unsound, and which aggravated the offense by justifying his indiscipline on secular grounds. It was evident that no progress could be made, until this prepossession had been dissolved; at the root of the difficulty lay a misunderstanding, real or assumed, which defeated every effort in his behalf. On the whole Messer Becchi preferred to believe that the misunderstanding was wilful: the motives which inspired it could at least

be understood and coped with. If, as Rome believed, the root of his resistance was pride, it could be appeased, though the pride of a blameless man caught in error was undoubtedly a fierce and unreasoning thing. If it was fear, it might be reassured. The fear of his life, which he repeatedly adduced as his excuse for not journeying to Rome, had been accepted by the Vatican, and an alternative offered; and as for the fear of losing his credit, it was obvious that resistance jeopardized it far more than reconciliation. These motives were human and amenable, with persuasion, to reason; but if he was under the spell of some power more potent than reason — ? The course he was pursuing was consistent only with destruction. Was that perhaps the explanation? the fascination of the abyss? the intoxication of suicide? the morbid satisfaction of martyrdom? the unconscious realization that defeat was his destiny and that reconciliation was an ignominious temptation — ? If so, he toyed with it only; his fatalism did not suppress the efforts it defeated; he continued to countenance the negotiations, and to expect them to succeed. Messer Becchi threw up his hands in bewilderment.

The enigma of his conduct is best explained, perhaps, by its inconsistency. In varying degrees, all these motives were no doubt present and confused in his mind; but what sealed them was his congenital romanticism. The truth was too simple. An accommodation was possible, which would have liquidated all his difficulties;

but his imagination, playing over his judgement like the wildfire whose magnetic disturbance deflects the compass, transformed the facts and magnified them into a momentous struggle of principle, in which his role was that of a tragic martyr, a lonely champion fighting single-handed the powers of Darkness. Nothing less would satisfy that insatiable craving for emotional excitement which dominated his whole life; and once more, for the last time, with fatal effect, its indulgence blinded him to the humble reality of his situation. Out of such illusions life works alternately its comedies and its tragedies; but his infatuation was now taking a grim turn.

The conditions in which he found himself favored it. He was cut off from the world; in isolation all the visionary obstinacy, all the simplifying moral exaltation of his nature came to the surface. Occasionally, from the outside world pierced the warnings of sober friends who attempted to recall him to the danger he was courting; but this was a thankless task. He replied with irrelevant appeals to God, trusting to the justice of his cause, and ascribing all obstacles to the machinations of unseen enemies. "We have done our duty," he replied to Pittorio, the Chancellor of Ferrara, "and it seems that the Pope is well disposed, but that some powerful adversary stands in our way." Manfredi, the Ferrarese ambassador, also sought to warn him; he, too, received his answer. "I have heard from Rome," he wrote to his

master, "that Fra Girolamo can by no means expect the absolution unless he obey the commands of his General, and that there is reason to fear that an Interdict will be laid on the City. I wrote him to this effect. He replies that he is well informed of all that goes on and that he is ready to defend the cause of God, or rather that God will defend his cause. We shall see, he says, whether God or man is more powerful." To his brother, Alberto, he wrote in the same strain: "If Rome is against us, it is against Christ, and contends with God. Fear not, God will win." Against such confidence it was useless to argue.

The one thing needed to confirm it was security, and that he now had in overflowing and fatal measure, through the solid support of his party. The ascendancy of the Frateschi during this period was due to a happy accident, which brought about a coalition with the Bigi, or Medicean partisans. After Piero's attempt on the city in May, his followers were violently pursued by the Arrabbiati; they rallied for cover to the Frateschi; and the unnatural alliance lasted as long as the pursuit continued. In August it came to a head in the trial of five leading citizens convicted of favoring Piero's return. Excitement was intense and the trial, which was long and stormy, shook the city and its new institutions to the roots. The accused, invoking the law of appeal introduced by the Frateschi, attempted to appeal to the Grand Council; but Valori blocked the appeal and by

the weight of his eloquence forced their execution. The odium of this initiative clung to him. He had the overwhelming support of popular passion, but when its fury subsided, a reaction set in. The city sickened of its own severity. The victims were men of great family, and their slaughter was the source of new feuds. A revulsion of feeling against faction swept the city, and the vindictiveness of Valori antagonized not only the Bigi but the great body of moderate and non-partisan opinion. Among the victims was a political rival of Valori, and it was whispered that Cato's patriotic passion was not wholly disinterested. It was noted, too, that one of the most merciful reforms of the Popular regime had been frustrated by its own sponsors. In this connection, some criticism fell on Savonarola, who was intimately associated in the public mind with Valori; it was felt that he had missed a golden opportunity to unite and pacify the city by intervening in behalf of the victims. It later developed that in one case he had done so, but coldly, and as Valori was influenced by the degree of warmth with which the Friar urged such petitions, his reluctance created general disappointment. The criticism was unfair; it took no account of the fact that he had retired from public life or that his plea would have been politically misconstrued. But such impressions, inexact and unreasoning in their particulars, are often shrewd in their general conclusions. Something more was expected of him than perfunctory piety and his indifference was

laid to the very motive he desired to avoid — political partiality. This oversight would have been unimportant — if it is ever unimportant to overlook mercy — had it not been for the change in public opinion, following the trial. The city was heart-sick, impoverished, and surfeited with faction; it craved order, stability, and industry. These were the ideals of the neutral middle classes, an inarticulate but substantial element, which was gradually asserting itself and which was to play a decisive role in the near future: and the popularity of the dominant party depended largely on its recognizing and conforming to its demands.

The Frateschi commanded their confidence in all respects but one. The exception was their devotion to the French alliance, through which they still hoped, despite all their deceptions in the past, to recover Pisa. Charles was planning a new invasion for the fall; he had promised to begin his campaign with the recapture of Pisa; and their policies henceforth were dominated by their determination to commit the city to the French cause. As the resistance of the League revived the activity of the Arrabbiati, who were its partisans, the credit of the two factions hinged henceforth on the varying fortunes of their foreign policies. For the moment, as Somenzi reported with disgust to his master, the Frateschi carried all before them. " Now we may say, Most Illustrious Lord, that the Frateschi have the government of the state freely in their hands, without con-

tradiction whatsoever; because, though some hold a contrary opinion, they dare not speak, since their leaders are slain." But there was a ray of hope in the very feature of the situation which seemed most threatening. "Here the tidings of France are reviving; that is, that His Majesty the King of France is determined to come in September; so that the city is once more entering into those fables of last year, touching these matters of France." On that hope Somenzi built; for was not the infatuation of the Frateschi for the French a delusion? had not the past proved it chimerical? and might it not yet prove a quicksand which would undermine and engulf them? Ludovico took the hint, and entered into immediate negotiations with the French.

In Rome, too, the French policy of the Frateschi was viewed with alarm, and the cause of the Friar was affected by it. It was no time to unmuzzle him, and Alexander began to consider the wisdom of adding a political string to the ecclesiastical condition for the repeal. The situation was once more becoming complicated, and the issue beclouded; the golden moment for a simple solution had passed. With the approach of the French Savonarola's resistance also stiffened. Once more the old infatuation dazzled him; despite all the deceptions of the past, he was inclined — he was eager — to believe that God had not utterly rejected Charles as His minister. Bitterly as he had repudiated his faith in him, he

needed to believe; doubt was the one form of defeat which his nature could not admit; and now he had an imperative practical motive as well to quicken his faith. Before him, in the event of an open conflict with Rome, loomed his last resort: an appeal to the Powers of Europe to summon a General Council of the Church, before which he could lay his case and carry the conflict to its supreme conclusion. He reserved the idea for an emergency, for it was delicate and dangerous, but he had begun to yield to its attraction. For its realization he needed the support of Charles; and surely the hope was not visionary. Since the death of the Dauphin, Charles had roused himself to the responsibilities of a King and a Christian. In the administration of finance and justice he had begun to set his house in order. He determined to live on his income and to turn over the revenues of the realm to public works and the defense of the kingdom. He presided at the bench; he disciplined dishonest officials; he was liberal in alms; he consorted with holy men, and heeded their counsels. Stimulated by these reforms, he aimed higher and higher. He tackled the Church. He detected abuses in the Order of St. Benedict, and was earnest to reform them; he wrestled with the knotty problem of absentee and multiple benefices among the clergy. His conscience and his ardor quickened by leaps and bounds; the old gallantry flamed forth; and at last he envisaged the tremendous problem which Savonarola had thrust upon him, which

seventeen Cardinals had entertained him with in Rome, and which Giuliano della Rovere, Alexander's untiring enemy, still pressed him to undertake — the purging of Rome. As a preliminary, he submitted three questions to the Sorbonne. (1) Was the Pope required by the decrees of Pisa and Constance to call a General Council every ten years, and could he be required to do so now, in view of the grave disorders reigning in the Church? (2) Could the scattered members of the Church, with the assistance of the Princes of Christendom, call such a Council, if he refused; and in that case, would they represent the Church Universal? (3) If the other Princes refused to intervene, could the King of France do so alone? The Vatican answered these questions, so fraught with momentous possibilities, by a flash of menacing wrath. But the Sorbonne, undismayed by the dread implications of a conflict of Papal and Conciliar authority, investigated them unflinchingly and eventually returned an affirmative answer. No more was needed to rekindle the Friar's faith; once more the French, the phantom French, loomed on the horizon, an apocalyptic host, bearing the cryptic sword of reform; and he faced Rome with renewed confidence.

September came, and the French had not moved: the vision wavered. October came, and it faded, leaving a barren reality. Without consulting Florence, Charles had concluded a truce with Milan, and the invasion was indefinitely postponed. The Frateschi, cruelly discomfited,

saw themselves duped once more by the French. Alexander, profiting by their embarrassment and pointing out that the councillors of the French King were opposed to the expedition, pressed Florence again, in return for the restoration of Pisa, to join the League. The bait was powerful, and the popularity of the Arrabbiati automatically revived. To counteract it, the Frateschi cast about for a diversion to recoup their credit and, fastening on the Friar, urged him to reappear in the pulpit.

The interests of his party and the promptings of his conscience converged. He needed little persuasion. The defection of the French opened his eyes; he saw that he was temporizing against the inevitable, that sooner or later he would be forced to choose between submission and open defiance of Rome, and that it was better to anticipate the decision voluntarily. In such impulses temperament plays the part it does in every crisis; it was the law of his nature to alternate, with the regularity of a pendulum, between caution and courage; and after a long period of discretion, the reaction was due. The truce could not be indefinitely prolonged; he had denounced the validity of the excommunication, and consistency demanded that he disregard it. The pest, on the pretext of which the churches had been closed, had justified his silence for a time; it was waning, life had resumed its normal activity — and its normal activity meant the crumbling of his work. He was readily con-

vinced that his silence was responsible for the relaxation of public morals and the revival of the Arrabbiati. Under such circumstances, he could not hesitate between the call of the convent and the call of the world. Already in September, a delegation of his boys had petitioned the Signoria that he might resume his sermons. The voice of the young generation was calling: was it not an ignominious evasion to ignore it — for what? for a futile propriety! Was not such caution the essence of cowardice? — the great denial which is called worldly wisdom? Could he ever hope to reconcile principle and expediency?

Nevertheless, he made one last attempt. The Government redoubled its pressure for the repeal, and he addressed a letter of effusive submission to the Pope. " Holy Father," he wrote, " I kiss the feet of Your Holiness as a child, grieving at having incurred the displeasure of his father, desires and seeks every means of appeasing his anger, nor can any refusal make him despair of regaining his former favor, since it is written — Ask and ye shall receive, knock and it shall be opened. So I, more afflicted by the loss of Your Holiness' favor than for any other misfortune, fly eagerly to your feet, begging you to give ear at length to my cries and keep me no longer from your embrace. For to whom shall I turn if not, as one of his flock, to the Shepherd whose voice I love to hear, whose blessing I implore, whose saving presence I ardently desire? I would go at

once and prostrate myself at your feet, if I were safe on the journey from the plots and malice of my enemies. As soon as I can do so without risk, I shall set out, and I wish that I might do so immediately, that I might clear myself at last of every calumny. Meanwhile, I most humbly submit in all things, as I have ever done to your authority, and if through any want of judgement or inadvertence I have erred in anything, I humbly ask forgiveness. For you will find in me at least no wilful malice. Be pleased, therefore, I beseech Your Holiness, not to close against me the font of your kindness and clemency, nor to spurn one whom you would find, if once you knew him, not less devoted to you than sincere, and at all times your most obedient servant." These blandishments, however, beguiled no one but himself. More was required to mollify Rome than a purely verbal submission; and as no mention was made, even now, of the point at issue, the absolution was not to be jerrymandered so easily. To have obtained it without concession on his part would indeed have been a triumph, and he was still dazzled by the hope of it. "He hopes that his affairs with the Pope will soon be settled," Manfredi wrote to Ferrara, "which, if it comes to pass, will turn to his great praise and commendation, the more so as he has not yielded to the Pope's demands." At the same time Manfredi delivered a prudent suggestion from the Friar. "Savonarola thinks that it would be no bad thing for the Duke to keep up good relations

with the French, so far as may be consistent with his honor and interests; he says that he does not see that the King of France has as yet been rejected by God." The Frateschi were of the same mind. Not only did they keep up good relations with the French, they prompted Charles to offer his ally a force for the recapture of Pisa, at the price of 150,000 scudi. The result of this bid was unfortunate. It was regarded in Florence as an impudent attempt to rid himself of his ally by an offer which he knew it too impoverished to pay, and the proposal was indignantly rejected. Each new attempt to regild the French lilies brought them into greater disfavor; the absolution was no nearer; and in exasperation the Frateschi determined to play their last card. A campaign of preliminary publicity prepared the public for Savonarola's return. A medal was coined in his honor, on the reverse of which was emblazoned a sword overhanging Rome, with the ringing motto: *Gladius Domini super terram cito et velociter;* while on the face, the features of the prophet, locked in obstinate and challenging scorn, smote the beholder with metallic determination. The grim face, the menacing reverse, completed each other with rigid consistency; on whichever side the coin fell, the immutable bronze rang with implacable resolution. Further hints and more quickening warnings followed fast. A mysterious parley of laymen and friars was held in San Marco, lasting seven hours, in which the prophet 'promised marvelous

things, and that the times were big and about to give birth; he pronounced indeed the most staggering things, word of which, being discussed in the city, revived his fame and also that of his party.' Then at last, on Christmas Day, he took the decisive step: he celebrated Mass in San Marco and gave communion to three hundred of his followers. On Epiphany Sunday, the Signoria attended Mass in a body and kissed his hand at the altar. The truce was over; and the struggle with Rome entered its final phase.

## III

In Florence the effect of this deliberate defiance of the ban was disconcerting. The extraordinary spectacle of the Signoria rendering official homage to an excommunicated priest at the High Altar filled even his followers with dismay, ' amazing thoughtful men, not only his adversaries, but also his friends,' as one of them tells us. The public was startled but it was shocked. It was idle to argue — the excommunication might be unjust but — *giusta vel ingiusta, temenda est.* The awe of the immemorial censure, the hollow chill of the archangelic trump blasting the flight of fickle souls in the eventide of the world, was mightier than reason. Even in recent years, a priest who similarly defied excommunication testified to the sense of sacrilegious terror which overtook him, as he celebrated the Sacrament with trembling

knees; against the force of such atavistic instincts no enlightenment availed. The timid fell away, and the faithful grew fanatic; his party passed into the hands of the extremists, reckless of consequences, sustained by the courage of despair, and committed by their very mistakes to persevere in them. The result was to isolate his sect, to draw the lines of party sharper, to breed new friction, and to alienate the conservative middle classes whose support was essential to their success and whose trade interests would be the first to suffer from a defiance of Rome. It was a result easy to foresee, but party passion — the bane of Florentine life — had blinded the Frateschi to everything but their immediate interests. Abandoned by their moderate adherents, they assumed the aggressive and courted contradiction. The Duomo was opened — while the churches of the Opposition were closed — and benches were put up for the Friar's first sermon. The work was supervised by vigilant officials, who jealously patrolled the church, alert for the first hint of a disturbance as a pretext to raid the Arrabbiati and arrest their leaders. But the Arrabbiati lay low, contenting themselves with paying out rope to the reckless, and bided the outcome. Simultaneously, another scandal, growing out of the French question, set the city by the ears. On their own responsibility, the Frateschi engaged the mercenaries which the city refused to hire. This unprecedented step, which not only thrust the unpopular question down the nation's throat

but overstepped the limits of authority, excited wide indignation as a flagrant abuse of office; and the scandal was aggravated when, to pay for the troops, they raised a loan from the Communal *Monte,* guaranteed by a group of wealthy volunteers; everything now seemed to point to a systematic and unscrupulous encroachment by a party clique on the functions of constitutional government. The prepotence, the reckless and overweening ambition, of these manoeuvres filled the city with alarm and mistrust. Inevitably, the question of the Friar was affected by it; it was an open secret by now that the Government was promoting his appearance for political purposes; the Friar and the French became two manifestations of the same breakneck policy, two poles between which circulated a dangerous political voltage. Savonarola himself recognized it, and attempted to extricate himself; he cancelled his sermon. But it was too late; the current swept him on; the Government was determined that he should preach before the March elections, and he was announced for Septuagesima Sunday (February 11). The Vicar of the Archbishop of Florence intervened, closed the pulpit, forbade all ecclesiastics to attend, and threatened the laity who did so with the penalties of excommunication; whereupon, with another arbitrary abuse of authority, the Signoria gave him two hours to withdraw his protest, on pain of banishment: an act of coercion which was compared to the despotism of the Medici. In this

atmosphere of tension, Savonarola preached his first sermon.

He avoided politics, but his attacks upon Rome were sufficiently sensational. The sermon began on a low, thrilling note of enforced self-control. "O Lord, You have set me on a sea where I can not nor will not turn back. But I beg of You this grace, to make me say nothing contrary to Scripture or the Church." He proceeded to defend himself by a calm and reasoned examination of the excommunication. "Now let us come to the excommunication. Know, then, that God governs the world by secondary causes; the good prince and the good priest are merely instruments in His Hands to govern the people. When the instrument is forsaken by the Maker, then he is nothing but a *broken tool.* — But how, you will say, are we to know if the prime mover is present or no? — See if his laws and commandments are contrary to charity and the good life, which are the root and principle of all wisdom; and when they are contrary, you may be certain that he is a *broken tool,* and that you are not bound to obey him. Now, tell me, what is the aim of those who have procured the censure by false information? We all know it; it is to destroy the good life and the good government and to open the gates to every vice. So soon as the excommunication came, they made for the taverns, for lechery, for every vice, and the good life has crumbled. Wherefore, if we are cursed upon earth, we are blessed in Heaven." But

his real defense, as always, was to attack, and he answered the curse of Rome with his own. "He therefore that commands us contrary to charity, which is the fullness of our law, *anathema sit!* If even an angel were to say it, if all the saints and the Virgin Mary (which certainly is impossible) were to say it, *anathema sit!* And if any Pope have ever pronounced the contrary of what I now tell you, let him be excommunicate!" Then, as if aware of the extravagance of these triumphant contradictions, he attempted to temper them with a lame reservation: "I do not say that any one ever has; but if any there were, then he was no instrument of the Lord, but a broken tool." But these prudent afterthoughts fell on deaf ears; they were too tame; violence was in the air; and its irresistible prompting brooked no denial. "Some are afraid," he continued, "that, though the excommunication have no weight with God, it is valid with respect to the Church. For me, it is sufficient that I am not censured by Christ. O Lord, if ever I seek absolution from this excommunication, send me to Hell: I shall blame myself as with a mortal sin. — O Father, there are yet some friars who claim that the excommunication is valid, and they will not absolve us." A sally of impatient contempt dismissed this objection. "Shall I tell you what to do? Alas, I had better keep peace. But this will I tell you . . . do thus . . ." and he completed his meaning in pantomime, jingling two keys together with the clink of coins. The need of

rallying the timid, the simple, the doubting, by more and more electrifying shocks dictated the climax: he concluded with mysterious intimations of momentous developments to follow. "O Father, you said that we should let the excommunication come, that we should carry it aloft on a spear-head, and that then you would disclose everything.—I reply that it is not complete yet and therefore you have not seen everything. But you have seen how someone in Rome has lost his son, and how others here have lost their lives and are gone to Hell, and you shall see their processes. As yet I have not been constrained to a miracle, but in His own time the Lord will extend His Hand, and already you have seen so many signs that there is no longer any need for a miracle. What greater miracle than the growth of our doctrine despite so much opposition? Citizens, women, we must give our lives for this truth. I turn to you, O Lord, You died for the truth; and I pray that You send me death in its defense, for the welfare of the Elect and of this people."

In the repercussions of this sermon lurked a danger, which his enemies were not slow to perceive and to exploit — a danger more formidable than the retaliation of Rome. Sensation was indispensable to his success; the law of climax was relentless; he could only survive by ever stronger stimulations. In the ambiguous promise of a miracle, though he evoked it only to

retract it, though he spirited it away in a cloud of metaphor, he was obeying unconsciously the hypnotic logic of this situation: and to his enemies these mystifications were manna. In the minds of the superstitious, the hint of a miracle was sufficient to create the demand for it, a demand which it was fatally easy to foster. An appeal to the supernatural — it was inevitable that his claims should culminate in that climax. They had only to create the occasion; even that was unnecessary; the fatal suggestion begot it spontaneously. He sensed the danger and struggled against it. As the insidious demand grew articulate, he rebuked and denied it. " An evil generation," he cried, " it is an evil generation which seeks signs." But he was in the grip of a power he could not placate. It swept away metaphors and half-measures impatiently. He might defer it, disclaim its necessity, symbolize the growth of the faith by it; but the demand in the popular mind for a material miracle drove him relentlessly toward a giddy climax, on the brink of which reason quailed over a bottomless pitfall. Already the fatal attraction was on him, and he attempted to satisfy it by an appeal to the Judgement of God through the consecrated form of the Eucharistic Rite. On the last day of Carnival, he promised that he would bless the people in the square of San Marco and " when I stand there," he said, " with the Host in hand, I beg each of you fervently to pray the Lord that, if this work come not from Him, He send a fire to plunge me into Hell. Re-

peat this prayer all these next days; write it and proclaim it to everyone." The demonstration took place with satisfactory results; but to those who had come in the expectation of seeing signs, it was a disappointing success. The crowd dispersed in irreverent levity. In the afternoon the Bonfire of the Vanities was repeated, but it failed to rekindle enthusiasm; the populace had cooled; and when the scoffers flung offal and dead cats on the fire, the sally was greeted with ominous gayety. More deadly than the apathy of the public, the revival of the quick Florentine spirit of ridicule was fatal; and the Frateschi, in redoubling their zeal to counteract it, only quickened it. Forming in procession, friars and laymen marched to San Marco and there, joining hands, circled the square in a solemn Davidic dance, chanting the psalm of fraternal conviviality: *Ecce quam bonum et quam jocundum habitare fratres in unum.* They sang, they sang lustily, but they sang alone. Nothing was less evident among the onlookers than brotherly rapture. Their apathy was more chilling than the bleak winds sweeping the frozen Arno, and their comments more cutting. The day which began with supernatural solicitings ended, in that raw Lenten dusk, with natural cynicism. The alternative was unavoidable; the terrible sanity of ridicule, on the one hand, the terrible insanity of miraculous mystifications, on the other: such was the suicidal choice of discredit which loomed before the trapped prophet. Which was the more

perilous? He did not hesitate. He alluded to the extravagance of his followers with satisfaction. "I have made them mad," he said.

And now his political support began to fail. The accumulated blunders of the Frateschi brought their defeat at the polls, and in the Signoria for March and April the Arrabbiati were in a majority. The returns were abroad the same evening, and in the darkening streets there were scuffles between the outgoing and incoming factions. But violence was not the present policy of the Arrabbiati. Though they had gained a foothold in the Government, they were still too weak to provoke a clash; in the Ten and the Eighty their opponents were solidly entrenched. Biding the re-election of those bodies, they adopted a strategy of non-resistance. The temper and the policies, if not the positions, of the two parties were now completely reversed. As the Frateschi grew more foolhardy, the Arrabbiati, belying their name, became milder. They perceived that the strength of the Opposition lay in not opposing. The situation, both at home and abroad, was in their favor; they had only to let it develop. Florence was restive, Rome was exasperated; and with calculated compliance they gave their colleagues full latitude to reap the crop of their follies.

## IV

In Rome feeling was now running high. The scandal of the Friar could no longer be ignored. His first public defiance of the censure on Christmas Day had produced no immediate result; but subsequent developments — the homage of the Signoria, the coercion of the Vicar, and the sermons — forced the issue. Yet at the very moment when they were inciting him to disregard it, the Frateschi continued to press for the repeal and even despatched a special envoy to Rome for the purpose. The apparent inconsistency of this conduct had yet a strain of gambler's shrewdness in it. They counted on Alexander's determination to win Florence to the League to offset his exasperation with Savonarola, and the calculation seemed sound. The Pope himself associated both issues and intimated that 'if only the affair of Pisa were settled, he would be disposed to grant anything.' They continued accordingly to play their desperate game both recklessly and shrewdly. At one moment a canard was floated, that they were about to abandon their traditional policy and lead Florence gently, through the eloquence of the Friar, into the League. Willing as Alexander was to subordinate the religious to the political question, the scandal had now attained proportions, however, which it was impossible to minimize. In the long months of truce, a whole polemical literature had

sprung up, assailing and defending the validity of the excommunication, and a question of discipline was rapidly developing into one of dogma. Wherever men met, the subject was discussed, and heated advocates rushed into print to defend their conclusions. When the nephew of Pico della Mirandola published an *Apology* in behalf of the Friar and dedicated it to an illustrious co-believer, the Duke of Ferrara, it drew the fire of Rome, and the Duke was forced to disown it. The arguments it embodied were orthodox; their gravity lay in their being discussed at all. That laymen should debate problems perplexing even to the trained minds of skilled seminarists and raise questions which could only breed confusion and mischief in simple souls; that they should develop a dangerous acquaintance with the Bible and cite Scripture to justify the dictates of independent judgement; that they should take the bit in their teeth and interpret cryptic texts on the duty of preferring God above man literally (Romans, XII, 1; Acts, V, 29); that they should distinguish between the Pope in his official and human capacity; that they should quote the Fathers on the many glaring errors and contradictions into which Popes and Councils had fallen: these were activities in the highest degree unwholesome and dangerous. The issues they raised were too far-reaching — thirty years later they led to the Reformation. The authority of personal judgement, the imprescriptible rights of freedom of conscience — in the

agitation of such problems lurked the germs of schism; and the agitation was spreading, with the publication of Savonarola's sermons, throughout Italy and even beyond the Alps. "Even from Germany," the Friar boasted, "come letters from new adherents whom our doctrine is gaining." A vast reservoir of discontent, a subterranean movement breaking the earth in subversive upheaval — was that apocalyptic prospect improbable? In France Charles was threatening a General Council. The alarmists began to stir. The Jubilee Year was approaching; it was time to act. With the reappearance of the Friar in the pulpit, this unrest had developed from academic discussion into active mutiny, abetted by the secular authority, tolerated by public opinion, and sustained by foreign sympathies. The man was becoming a movement; the authority of the Church was undermined; and Alexander, for all the laxity of his life, was too sound a churchman and too far-sighted a statesman to allow its only arms, its censures, to be flouted.

That the authority of the Church was undermined by its corruption, which made the movement possible, only intensified the menace. It was not merely a matter of self-defense; in the interests of religion itself it was necessary to preserve at all costs the form of the faith — to preserve it even, if need be, against the spirit. To that sad sophistry had the conscience of corruption come; for the faith was already too profoundly undermined

by the demoralization of the clergy, the scepticism of the laity, and the corroding results of the freethinking fashions of the day, to suffer revival. The futility of reform was its real mischief. The Church, for better or worse, was a worldly institution: its ministers, subdued to the element they worked in, were mundane; and to expect them to revert to Christian simplicity was an anachronistic absurdity, as impractical as it was reactionary. Moreover, the practical fallacy involved a doctrinal one. The emphasis which Savonarola placed upon morals was un-Catholic. The essence of faith was *faith,* not action: humanity was incapable of salvation by its own efforts, and a lively sense of human infirmity was indispensable to a true state of grace. Its foundation was humility, a self-effacing surrender, a mystic nonentity, through which alone the creature could hope to regain the Creator. Conduct was secondary; it was almost irrelevant; and it might even be an impediment when it substituted moral autonomy for the loyal subservience of original sin. That danger — how insidious! how misleading! — the self-sufficiency of Savonarola showed only too well. For his part, Alexander had never confused conduct and faith. With perfect consistency, he could rise from a carnal bed to adore the Blessed Virgin, or promulgate missions in conclave and smile at buffoons mimicking the Mass in the ante-room. These were the contradictions which scandalized his critics; the vulgar were baffled by his indifference to irrelevant

details. From every point of view, indeed, the literal morality of the Friar and his followers was a vulgar error, which he would have preferred to ignore; but it had now reached a point which called for the stern arm of correction. Alexander unfolded his fat, jewelled hands, and reluctantly reached for his wrath.

Reluctantly; for he admitted the misguided simplicity of the man as much as he mistrusted the menace of the movement. Moreover, the awe of his arms lay in their threat, not in their use; the disregard which had greeted the excommunication augured ill for the effect of the Interdict; and with that last bolt the armory was empty. He hesitated; and his conduct betrayed his perplexity. The tone of his official pronouncements was suspiciously suggestive of bluster; and in private his temper crackled with spasmodic irritation. He resented the irksome duty thrust upon him and snatched at every pretext to avoid a rupture. When the ambassador presented himself, immediately after the resumption of the sermons, the Pope made one final attempt to revert to the political question. Had Florence made up its mind, he asked, to resist the King of France, if he returned to Italy? Bonsi could not say; he protested that his countrymen would prove good Italians — and was that not enough? It was not. The Pope, suddenly yielding to his annoyance, replied that he knew very well that they would not dissociate themselves from the French King, and ' rising abruptly, he would not hear another word. As he left

the room, he turned to me and said: Let your Friar Jerome preach then! I should never have thought you would treat me so! ' Three days later Bonsi was again received, and this time the Pope took advantage of the presence of several Cardinals to commit himself to a public pronouncement, ' that it might be clearly understood that he would by no means change his mind.' He spoke of the Friar ' in the strongest terms and with extreme heat.' Neither Turk nor Infidel, he declared, would tolerate such conduct, and he charged Bonsi to dispatch a special courier with the warning of the Interdict, unless the sermons were immediately discontinued. When Bonsi attempted to speak, he was so severely reprimanded and repeatedly interrupted that he could make no headway. Lashing himself into a rage, His Holiness caused some scurrilous epigrams which had come from Florence to be read aloud, and complained bitterly that he should be made the sport of ballad-mongers. Finally, he dismissed him with a repeated injunction to send the courier incontinently.

Bonsi did as he was bid, and not without satisfaction. He was himself in an irksome predicament. It was clear that all hope of accommodation had fled; if the Government had determined on open resistance, his mission was not only futile, it was humiliating. But the Government was impervious to reason; it bade him persevere and insisted that, ' since this is a matter that passes the limits of Nature,' it deserved exceptional consideration.

He was disgusted; his ardor for the Friar rapidly cooled. Furthermore, the Ten were economical. He apologized, grimly, for the expense of the special courier. " I understand your solicitude that I should be sparing of expense in correspondence," he wrote, " and it is only at the Pope's urgent command and much against my will that I now send a special courier." But he allowed himself the luxury of a little plain-speaking. " It is quite useless to insist on the virtues of the Friar or his reasons and arguments, for they make no impression here. In a word, you must act with the utmost promptness, if you wish to escape the Interdict. . . . As for what you say of the supernatural character of the Friar's work, no one in Rome can be persuaded of this, nor is it of any use to attempt to secure the support of anyone here, especially of those who have heard what he has said against the Pope. Moreover, there are plenty of people here eager to pour fuel on the fire. Be good enough to send your letters in such form that they may be shown to the Pope, according to the usage of this Court."

The messenger sped away with these words of sobering sense, but after all his expense was wasted. It fell to the duty of the new Signoria, in conjunction with the Ten, to answer the Papal Brief; and the Signoria, pursuing their policy of compliance, gave their colleagues full liberty to deal with it as they would. The tone of the Brief reflected the Pope's unsettled temper. Opening with a denunciation of ' the grave and pernicious errors

of that son of iniquity, Fra Hieronymo Savonarola of Ferrara,' it commanded that he be sent under custody to Rome where, if he returned to penitence, he would be paternally received, ' since we desire not the death but the conversion of the sinner '; or that at least he be segregated, ' as a corrupt member of the flock from the rest of the people and kept sequestered and guarded so that he may not, by intercourse, sow new scandals '; and it concluded with the threat of the Interdict. It produced the expected reaction. The Ten were indignant; they particularly resented the phrase, *the son of iniquity;* and Savonarola flung it back from the pulpit. " Write to them that he whom you call by that name does not wanton but devotes himself to preaching the faith of Christ." He rallied the Government on its circumspection. " You show too much indulgence and consideration in your replies. Let me answer in a word. I will thunder in their ears after such a fashion, that they will hear indeed! " And, flinging away caution, he countered with the threat of the General Council. " The time draws near to *open the casket,* and if we do but *turn the key"* — these were its accepted symbols — " there will come forth such a stench from Rome that it will stink in every one's nostrils." The Ten took his tone; the Signoria echoed it, and drew up a reply defending *the son of iniquity* and regretting their inability to obey the Papal commands, ' not only because we should be doing a thing unworthy of our Republic and unjust to a man

who has deserved so well of his country, but because even if we would, we could not, without popular discord and grave danger to many; so great is the favor which the Friar has won by his integrity.' ' Nevertheless,' they concluded, ' we remain, as we have always been, faithful to the Church and the Catholic religion; declaring, however, that we care more for our Republic than for other considerations.'

This provocative reply was well calculated to force the Interdict, and Somenzi immediately decoded its purpose. " This letter has been written in the name of the Signoria," he informed Milan, " only that His Holiness should be forced to proceed further in this matter; so that those in the City who claim that His Holiness does not act in this matter of his own volition, but that it has been begged and bought by Florentines, may be undeceived; and also so that the Signoria may more justifiably proceed against the Friar, without incurring blame from anyone." But these calculations did not reckon with Alexander's own reluctance to launch the bolt. He was firmly convinced that the threat would suffice, and after the dispatch of the Brief he regained his wonted composure. A few days later, Bonsi found him ' most favorably disposed ' — and this despite the efforts made on all sides to goad him. The Venetian Ambassador tried to stir up bad blood; he remarked that the licence which the Florentines accorded their Friar was an indication of the esteem in which they held His

Holiness; but he was balked by the immense, bovine, imperturbable magnanimity of the man. Provided they acted in accordance with his Brief, the rest, Alexander replied, would not much trouble him — he was determined that no personal affront should blind him to the common good of Italy. His personal pride was the least danger; his tolerance of abuse was notorious. Cesare could not brook it, and he blamed his hot temper; the blood of the Borgias was incompatible with a thin skin. "I often told him," he remarked once, "that Rome is a free city and that anyone can speak and write as he likes here; that evil is spoken of me also, but I let that go for what it is worth." The reply to his Brief, however, shocked him — shocked him almost into action. Bonsi presented it in person, and was privileged to observe his reaction in the raw. The Pope had it read aloud by the Bishop of Parma; when the reading was over, he scowled hopelessly. "A wretched letter," he sighed. He was amazed that the Signoria should write such a letter, which belied its own expressions of loyalty; Savonarola had dictated it — he was sure of it — he recognized his style. Stripping it of its excuses, he worked himself up into a passion. He was not malicious; he did not blame his doctrine but only his obstinate disobedience and contempt of the Holy See. Neither was he misinformed: the sermons were in print; he had read the passages in which he made light of the ban and declared that he would sooner go to Hell than seek absolution, and called him

a *broken tool,* and reproached him with the death of his son. At that memory he flushed. He would be justified, he declared, in proclaiming the Interdict at once but — once more he drew back, moodily sniffing his wrath — but he would give Florence one last chance, and he dismissed the ambassador with a final irrevocable threat. Shortly after, the Bishop of Parma, who had remained with the Pope, rejoined Bonsi and assured him that, unless Savonarola sought absolution, all was lost. But, he added, if only he could be induced to make *some show of submission,* the Pope would not refuse him permission to preach. Bonsi opened wide eyes. Was the Bishop insinuating — it was incredible — that the Pope was seeking merely to save his face?

But the pressure upon Alexander was too strong. All the irreconcilables in Rome sprang to arms. One more propulsion was needed; eager volunteers sprang forward. Cardinal Sforza plied him for an ultimatum; Piero de' Medici reappeared in the Vatican; and the hue and cry brought out Fra Mariano da Gennazzano. No more was needed. No more was needed indeed than Savonarola's old rival to voice, nay, to mouth, the anonymous fury of public opinion. For years he had lain steeped in gall, maturing deliciously for this moment; for years all the malice of mortified mediocrity had seasoned his venom. He had prospered; he had his church in Rome; he was General of his Order; but no balm could soothe the old smart, his heart still ached with

his rival. Opportunity called; a Savonarola was needed to trump Savonarola; and he arose. When a hint was dropped in high quarters that he expose the fallacies of the Friar from his pulpit, he leapt with alacrity, as he had leapt seven years before, to a similar invitation from Lorenzo de' Medici — and with the same result: time had taught him nothing. Seven years, seven lean years, and History repeated itself with the conscientious precision of a schoolmaster. Once more a brilliant audience assembled to hear him; once more he shocked his own sponsors by his scurrility. Even a Medici was present to link the two scenes; among the Cardinals sat Lorenzo's son, bland, with his eyeglass, to umpire his retrieve of the past. An eyewitness has described the scene. " The Cardinals and the congregation . . . expected him to expose the alleged errors of Fra Girolamo and to refute them with sound and fundamental arguments; but he could not pay up; and so he helped himself out with vociferation." He was among friends; among friends one could speak freely; and rolling back the sleeves of his surplice and rubbing his hands, he let himself go. In a paroxysm of vituperation, crying ' like one beside himself,' he peppered the reprobate with abuse. " The Jew! the rascal! the scoundrel! the thief! " He clapperclawed him with an aim so blundering that the blows rebounded on himself; with each thrust he fell over himself and wallowed in deeper confusion. He stripped his hypocrisy: " He wears a short robe and

preaches poverty, and his pockets are lined with coin! Believe me, I know. It takes a friar to tell a friar; we have more skins than an onion; if you would know the truth about one, ask another." The Cardinals eyed one another askance. He denounced his vainglory. "Pope Alexander leaks less often than medals are coined in his honor." A rigidity came over their Eminences. "O Pope, O Cardinals, how can you tolerate this monster, this hydra? Is the authority of the Church come to this, that a sot can roll under your feet?" He apostrophized the sot. "Do you know when you see your visions? When you are full of good Trebbiano! You can not fool me!" A power more potent than that shrewd sour wine quickened his clairvoyance, and he pricked his rival's prophecies with predictions of his own. "You call yourself a holy prophet; and when you burn, those boys of yours will be the first to bring faggots to the fire." He lashed the inaction of the See. "O College, O Pontiff, take measures against him! You do not realize his machinations, he will say things to darken the sun. But you make no provision against him; to-day anyone can frig you to your faces, and but for my reverence I would show you." And under the holy hood of the pulpit he flashed the obscene gesture in their eyes. History has preserved it as his testamentary act. The Cardinals 'gave plain signs of their displeasure,' the congregation broke up in disorder; and so Fra Mariano fades from the scene in a fury of impotent vociferation.

Such attacks defeated themselves; but Rome was now thoroughly aroused. Rioters attacked the Florentine Embassy, and Bonsi wrote home begging to be relieved of his post. By the same courier went the Pope's ultimatum. It had been twice draughted, and only some impatient phrases survived from the first in the final form, which breathed an outraged moderation. "We should never have thought," the Pontiff protested, "that your audacity would lead you to contend with us over the question of Fra Girolamo Savonarola, as if it were a matter of disputing a law-suit, and as if it were not your duty to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. It is time now to put an end to the infinite multiplication of these letters and Briefs. Know, therefore, and hold it for certain, that this Fra Girolamo is excommunicated not through any misinformation or instigation, but because of his disobedience to our commands to join the new Tusco-Roman Congregation and the manifest contempt with which he has received our excommunication, continuing to preach as if he were an angel sent by God. We do not condemn him for his good works or the fruits obtained in your City, on the contrary, we praise him; but we wish him to come and seek pardon for his petulant pride, and we will willingly grant it, when he has humbled himself before us. You have not only encouraged this Friar in his disobedience, but by preventing all others from preaching you have made him well-nigh your oracle of Apollo. And we shall

never rest, therefore, until amends have been made to the honor and dignity of the Holy See, which this worm has been able, with your support, to affront. Consider your actions maturely, since, only as you show yourselves prompt in obedience, will we consent to allow your requests for the material interests of your Republic. In any case, reply with no more letters, but with acts only; because we are firmly decided to tolerate your disobedience no longer; and we will place the Interdict on your City, to last as long as you continue to place faith in this monstrous idol of yours."

Florence at last awoke to the gravity of the situation, and the Frateschi themselves saw that the game was up. They made one last stubborn stand and attempted to carry the discussion before the Eighty, where they still had a solid majority, but they were outvoted. The Opposition was now determined to lift the question out of party bounds and submit it to a general referendum. A Council was called for the 14th of March, between the Signoria, the principal Colleges, the Twelve Worthies — recently elected and hostile to the Friar — and twenty-five delegates from the various wards of the City. The Frateschi foresaw its issue; they sounded popular opinion and found it as unfavorable in Florence as in Rome; and they began to pack. Savonarola was advised to announce from the pulpit that, to avoid scandal, he would yield, if need be, to the inevitable — to the concensus, that is, of public opinion and the

decision of the Government — voluntarily. In the Council they rallied to his defense with the hopeless passion of martyrs. " We have had all Italy against us before now, and yet God has saved us. Why should we leave the sure road, shown by his sermons, to follow an uncertain one? " They appealed to civic pride. " The Pope has authority in the spiritual and not in the temporal sphere. It would not become our dignity to act as his sheriffs and bailiffs. All this is the work of the mighty and if you yield, the Pope will require more dishonorable concessions." They rallied to loyalty, courage, and faith. " We should rinse our mouths before mentioning the name of Fra Girolamo, and not propose holding him at the disposal of the Pope. Where should we be without his work? Why are you afraid of the Interdict? Let it come, as it has come many times before. What worse can befall us than the sudden assault of the Emperor, whom they sent against us? And were we not delivered then by the Lord? " But they were overruled by the trade interests, for whom the Interdict spelled ruin. Their spokesman, however, paid tribute to the Friar by glossing his objections with a parallel to antique chivalry as unexpected as it was elegant: " Remember," he warned his countrymen, " the fate that overtook Troy for refusing to restore Helen." Even Valori conceded the gravity of the situation. He opposed vigorously the mere thought of surrendering the Friar or sealing San Marco. " This monastery is a school of goodness," he

said, " and fifty years hence it will be more famous than it is now. As for the Friar, I adjure you to honor and venerate him more than any man that has lived in the last two hundred years." But he was willing to temporize. " We must go slowly, because if we turn this wheel, we will gain nothing but trouble." When the votes were drawn, eight held out in favor of the Friar, seventeen were opposed to him, and seven were undecided. The Signoria, unsatisfied with a split majority, moved to carry the question to the Grand Council. But the Frateschi, foreseeing in their reversal by a popular referendum complete political collapse, blocked the motion and succeeded in substituting for it a second Council of nineteen select-men. This body confirmed the verdict of the first, and again the rapids of the Grand Council loomed ahead, roaring of rocks and wreckage. They struck a private bargain, therefore, with the Opposition by which they saved themselves from political disaster. In return for a unanimous decision to suspend the sermons, they stipulated that San Marco should not be sealed, thereby preserving their credit and their headquarters. But what was the headquarters without the head? For a moment it seemed as if the Friar himself, like the situation, threatened to outgrow their control. Valori informed him privately of this decision, that he might anticipate it, if he chose, by a voluntary withdrawal. Not only did he take no advantage of this opportunity; when the decision was officially transmitted

to him, he replied with disconcerting independence. "You come from your masters?" he said to the Chancellor. "Yes." "Very well. I, too, must consult my Master." And he adjourned his decision to the morning.

The Government was unpleasantly impressed by this reply. Resistance was out of the question, and his delay was no more, probably, than a matter of form. But what if it meant a real indecision? what if his Master inspired him with the recklessness of despair? what if he took the situation in his own hands, regardless of consequences? His position was desperate. The parting of the ways had come. While his party was manoeuvering for political safety, he was left to bear alone the brunt of his breach with Rome. He was stranded, and hopeless men are the prey of headlong impulses: the prospect was disquieting. When the Chancellor was gone, the Friar took his nightlight and his Bible and pored over the tale of Jeremiah, the prophet who was cast away by the Lord, when He no longer had need of him, and stoned by men. The flame burned lean and high, in the airless cell; at last it failed; darkness descended; and so, groping for guidance, he entered the night of his abandonment, alone.

X

# *The Ordeal By Fire*

## I

ON the following morning (March 18, 1498) he preached his last sermon. Submission was inevitable and he surrendered, but defiantly. To a man so sensitive to popular esteem it was impossible to baldly admit his defeat, and in a desperate attempt to disguise it, he opened his heart to the public, examined his motives, and exposed all the heartsearchings of the night, through which he had reached his decision. "O Father," he challenged himself, "we are a little scandalized that you should submit your decision to men. If your preaching or not preaching depends on God, it does not seem proper that you should yield to men, and we believe no longer." "I told you," he replied, "that God recommended my preaching and perseverance; but I told you also that it was not His purpose to grant you salvation against your will; and therefore I consented to your Councils and agreed to observe their decisions, because the Lord will not force your welfare upon

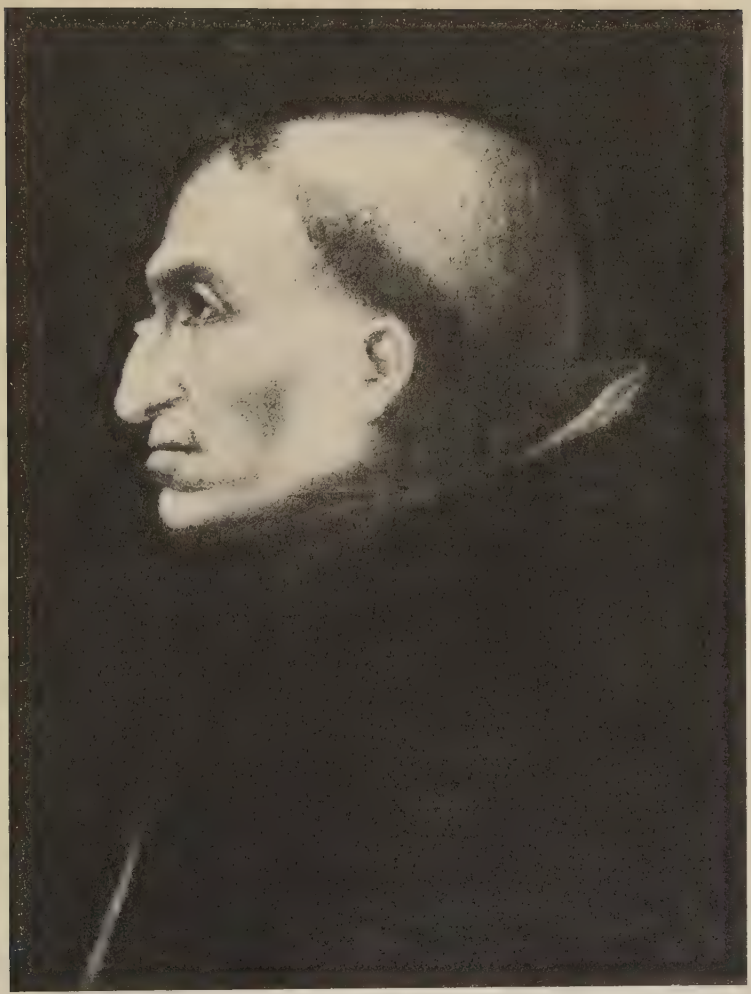
you. — O Father, but you said you would never be still, though your head lay on the block, you would continue to exclaim. — Alas, I believed in your faith, though I were to deny it. I tell you in any case that this mission comes from God and is destined to continue, without doubt whatsoever." And yet the fact, the hard humiliating fact, remained: he was suppressed. " But I would not boast of it," he cried. Others would continue to preach in his stead, and what he could not accomplish by preaching he would do by prayer. For himself, he would welcome a return to his books; his enemies, he said, could do him no greater favor; but he could not abandon his mission. " O Rome," he cried, reverting to prophecy, " you will find it hard to crush this goad! You will be purged, believe me! You see only this stick, you do not see the steel within it, nor the goad. It has pricked you so deep that you are ill at ease and would fain retire with honor. But it will prick you yet deeper, believe me! Italy, Italy, the Lord is with me, you can do nothing! Florence, arm yourself as you will, you will be overthrown; you can not crush this goad, for the Lord is with me, like a mighty warrior. Wherefore I warn you, they that persecute me shall fall, some by the sword, some by the pest, and they will be downcast, and their strength will be vehemently confounded, like ants, and great will their confusion be."

The old prophetic fury rolled forth; yet even he now felt its futility. He admitted that 'he had become the

laughing-stock of the world,' that he had often been tempted to desist; but he was in the grip of a power beyond his will. "But when I mounted the pulpit, I could not contain myself, I could not do otherwise. The Word of the Lord became, in this place, like a consuming flame devouring my heart and my marrow; I could not gainsay it, I must needs utter it, for I burn with it utterly, I feel myself inflamed with the Spirit of the Lord. O Lord, O Spirit, you fear no man in the world; you take no account of the countenances of man, to be as they please, you tell every man the truth roundly. O Spirit, you excite tempests and tribulations against me, you stir up the waves of the sea like wind, you rouse the tempests. Ah, stay! I cry. But the Spirit replied, it can not do otherwise."

Rarely do men reveal themselves so completely. In that moment, in an inspired flash, he recognized that the fatality of his life lay in his eloquence. "The Word of the Lord became, *in this place,* like a consuming flame." In the pulpit there was no choice; his intoxication swept him on recklessly. He saw it now. The fatal necessity of dominating an audience had been the compulsion which governed his whole career. His early failures as a preacher, his subsequent triumphs — with a terrible logic they had led him, step by step, from rhetoric to reality, and there was no respite. "Ah, stay, I cry! But the Spirit replies, it can not do otherwise." It was irresistible; yet, clearly as he recognized its force, he was

happily unaware of its nature: the Word was the Word of the Lord. For a brief, dazzling moment, he saw — and then the saving illusion of a divine inspiration sealed his eyes. It only remained now to face the consequences; he knew that they were pitiless but "I brace my back to receive them willingly," he said. He had no illusions as to his fate. "The Master wields the hammer, and when He has employed it to His purpose, He does not replace it in the chest but casts it away. So was it with Jeremiah; when He had used him as He would, He cast him away to be stoned. So will it be likewise with this hammer; when He has wielded it, He will cast it away." As for the flesh 'which is frail' he admitted its power. "In the beginning when I embarked on this sea, I discerned somewhat; but I was bidden not to fear, and told that we should soon pass this first flood-tide. If I had foreseen the end then, I might have fled, like Jonah in Tarsus." In the pulpit he was reckless; "If I were always as I am up here, I should never know fear"; but he trusted in God that 'reason would prevail,' and prayed that his faith should not fail. "The Lord is with me!" he cried again and again. "O Lord, may I not say it? Surely I may say it. Therefore I say boldly this morning: If I am deceived, Christ, you have deceived me! Holy Trinity, if I am deceived, you have deceived me! If I am deceived, Angels, you have deceived me! Saints in Paradise, Saints without number, if I am deceived, you have deceived me!" And with



*Savonarola (?)*

that cry of supreme self-assurance — so suggestive of reassurance — he took leave of Florence and his career.

The conquest of eloquence had indeed led him far — into a situation from which he could no longer escape in words; and his efforts to do so roused, in one observer, a caustic smile. Among those who attended his last sermons was a young law-student, who analyzed them with realistic insight for which his name has since become famous. To Niccolo Machiavelli the man was a wind-bag. He noted his pulpit methods — the 'great terrors' with which he impressed the groundlings; the 'reasons most compelling to those who did not examine them'; the passionate appeals to crude partisanship, 'showing his partisans to be nonpareils and his opponents knaves, and employing all those arguments which weaken the adverse party and strengthen his own'; the peculiar intuition, also, with which his tone fluctuated with the political situation, 'wherein, to my mind, he follows the times and colors his lies accordingly' — and he dismissed him with a shrug. In later years, he modified this judgement but he continued to invest him with a quality native to his own mind — "insincere astuteness." Shrewdness is sometimes its own dupe, and none can be more ingenuous than the systematic cynic. He judged the man by his methods. Time-serving, mystifications, oratorical conjury, emotional showmanship — these were there, no doubt, but they were consistent with sincerity. Later, he came

nearer the truth with his famous phrase on the helplessness of 'prophets unarmed' — *i propheti disarmati* — whose only force lies in the fugitive effects of their eloquence. The Friar was fighting facts with phantom arms — mystification and time-serving and emotional oratory — but when these were exhausted, he was ready to face them squarely.

## II

THE defiance of that farewell sermon, in fact, was more than a mere fanfaronade: it concealed a serious purpose. When he warned Rome that the goad contained a core of steel which was unbending and which would prick it yet deeper, he meant it. Only a few days before he had alluded to the General Council. "This is a delicate point," he said, "and I wish to reserve it and place in my pouch for a while; the time has not yet come." But it was rapidly approaching.

The suspension of the sermons had by no means satisfied the Pope. In accepting a truce for submission, he realized that he had conceded too much. The man, as he knew by now, was irrepressible; and others were preaching his message — Fra Domenico and his helpmates — more violently than he. Usually slow to anger and easily appeased, he was now conscious of a new and painful sensation — self-reproach. The crisis in his veering mood has been reached; nothing is more ruth-

less than a timid nature when once it regrets its laxity, and the imputation of weakness was the one thing necessary to make him implacable. Cardinal Sforza urged him to send a prelate to Florence to bring Savonarola to Rome. He agreed and then, on Bonsi's protest, reconsidered; but his patience was strained, and he was in a dangerous mood. At this moment, he received a letter from Savonarola, which settled him. A terrible letter, those who saw it called it; and terrible it was because the writer made the mistake of being right once too often. While Alexander was doubting his ways and rueing his lenience, the Friar, with his fatal gift for being always right and always wronged, took up his pen and in a strain of unimpaired self-confidence protested against his persecution and warned the Pope to 'provide for his health.'

"Holy Father," he wrote, "I always thought that it was the duty of a good Christian to defend the faith and correct morals; but in this labor I have encountered only trials and tribulations; not one who would aid me. I hoped in Your Holiness; but you have preferred to join my enemies and give fierce wolves leave to cruelly torment me. No heed has been given to the reasons I adduced, not to excuse my error but to prove the truth of my doctrine, my innocence, and my submission to the Church. I can no longer hope in Your Holiness; I must turn, therefore, to Him who chooses the weak of this world to confound the strong lions of the wicked. He

will aid me to sustain and prove to all the world the sanctity of this work for which I suffer so much, and inflict the just penalty on those who persecute me and attempt to prevent it. As for myself, I seek no earthly glory but await death with eagerness. I beseech Your Holiness to delay no longer but to provide for your health."

The dark Spanish blood of Alessandro Borja began to burn. The melancholy dignity of the letter, the martyred air of injury, the unruffled assurance, and the cryptic threat at the close — he hardly knew which infuriated him the most. But undoubtedly that threat was the last affront — and the last it should be! 'To provide for his health'! The phrase was vague, but there was no mistaking its drift: the man was serving notice of some impending attack; and Alexander smiled grimly at his punctiliousness — the worm! the worm!

The Friar had in fact given notice of his purpose, and he now prepared it rapidly. He draughted a letter to the sovereigns of France, England, Spain, Austria, and Hungary, urging the convocation of a General Council, while five of his friends paved the way by writing to confidential agents in those courts. It was necessary to act rapidly, for he had already bruited the idea; but it was also necessary to act prudently, for the Council was a tremendous undertaking. Its doctrinal dangers were great, involving as they did the vexed question of the primacy of Papal and Conciliar

authority. Under certain conditions laid down by the Council of Constance, such as flagrant disorder in the Church and misconduct in its head, a Council might indeed be called, without the consent of the Pope; and these the times seemed to meet; but it remained a moot question whether the Vicar of Christ could ever be deposed by any authority but his own. No good Romanist would subscribe to that assumption; and in the contrary position lurked the spectre of Gallicanism, the pitfalls of heterodoxy, perhaps of heresy. It was necessary, therefore, first to convince the Powers that a legitimate emergency had arisen to warrant the step; and secondly, to produce unexceptionable grounds on which the Pope might be impeached. Neither simony nor the scandals of his personal life sufficed; he was a symbol and as such immune and indestructible. This was apparently an insurmountable obstacle, but there was one point upon which Savonarola seized. The Pope was a symbol — of Faith; if he could be convicted of disbelief his authority automatically crumbled. Atheism, therefore, was the foundation of his charge against Alexander. The grounds on which he based it are unknown — they were in all probability scandalous gossip — but he was sufficiently positive to act on them. In his letter to the Powers he declared that he had secret proof of 'unheard-of abominations, the revelation of which would prove the horror and stupefaction of the human race.' " I testify, *in verbis Dominis,* that this Alexander

is no Pope, nor can be considered such, since, leaving aside his most execrable sin of simony, by which he bought the Papal throne and daily sells ecclesiastical benefices to the highest bidder, and his other manifest vices, I affirm that he is no Christian and does not believe in God, which passes the limits of every infidelity."

Through those perilous reefs he steered successfully; but beyond them lay an uncharted sea of practical difficulties. Assuming the convocation of the Council, who would guarantee its constitution and its outcome? "In a Council we must have reformers to right what is wrong," he explained to his followers, "and where are those reformers to-day?" He could but pray. It was indeed a tremendous undertaking — to stir the conscience of Europe single-handed, by the sole force of his eloquence. The timid youth of twenty-two years before had developed, however, for he was undaunted. With far-flung eloquence he labored to touch the consciences of Kings, with inspired promptings, and with imperious appeals which brooked no rival to his need. Maximilian he reminded of the immemorial responsibilities of the Iron Crown. Ferdinand and Isabella he urged to waste no time on the Moors; "What do your victories over the Infidel matter? You are building externally, while the foundations of the Church are undermined from within." But for Charles he reserved his sternest appeal; in him he trusted most, and by him

he had been most deceived: he was his moral creditor. "Remember that you have had a first token of the wrath of God. You bear the name of Most Christian King, you the Lord has elected, to you He has entrusted the sword of His vengeance — will you consent to the ruin of the Church?"

The force of this prayer was never tested, however, for the preliminary letter to France miscarried. On the Milanese frontier the messenger was intercepted by Ludovico's spies, searched, and rifled of his highly incriminating mail. It was rushed to Rome; but before Rome could retaliate, a sudden attack from another quarter had put an end forever to the Friar's incendiary career.

## III

The attack rose suddenly and without warning: no mephitic omens forecast it, but the earth gave forth flames to wreathe his end.

Among all the rancors which he had aroused, not the least dangerous was the jealousy of rival orders. Preaching in Prato the previous year, Fra Domenico had been challenged by a Franciscan friar, Fra Francesco da Puglia, to prove the truth of his master's doctrines in an ordeal by fire. The fearless disciple accepted with alacrity, whereupon his opponent eclipsed himself, and no more was heard of the matter. The two friars were

now preaching in Florence and the Franciscan, stung by an allusion to the past, revived his challenge; but this time he took the precaution of addressing it to Savonarola himself. In this he felt safe; the risk of his accepting seemed remote; and his purpose was sufficiently served by embarrassing the hated Dominican. But he had not reckoned with Fra Domenico. The lion-hearted disciple threw himself athwart the scheme and insisted on answering the challenge himself. He published the points at issue in a series of *Conclusions,* which he declared himself ready to sustain with his life. The Franciscan, however, would burn with no underling. 'The dispute,' he insisted, 'is with Savonarola, and with him he would enter the fire, though he believed he would burn, because he wished that breeder of scandal and perverse doctrine to perish also; with Fra Domenico he had no quarrel.' Such zeal, for such a motive, would no doubt have won him a peculiar renown among martyrs, but Savonarola ignored him. The quarrel had reached this point and might again have subsided, had not a new and sinister element crept into it. The Arrabbiati had seen their opportunity and seized it. They backed the Franciscans and blew on the flame, fanned the embers of popular superstition, already smouldering with Savonarola's miraculous promises, and secured the complicity of the Signoria, who published the *Conclusions* with an invitation to volunteers on both sides to enlist for the ordeal.

It all came up suddenly, so suddenly that before Savonarola realized what had happened, he was trapped. Occupied with his letters to the Powers, he neglected to stamp out the flames, and suddenly they were about him. He rebuked Fra Domenico severely, but it was too late to curb him, the man was inspired, the situation had grown out of hand, and the honor of God was involved. He protested, declaring that if he were free to preach he would defend the *Conclusions* in debate, by reason. — Reason! The time for that was past: another and more relentless logic was at work. He had himself created the demand for a literal miracle, and in the heated state of popular excitement, he could no longer explain it away as an oratorical metaphor. His enemies had ignited the most inflammable passions of the mob, fanaticism, superstition, bloodlust, and brutality, all the primitive insanities of blood and brain into which mankind invariably relapses from any attempt to sublimate its mediocrity. He had played fast and loose with life too long; it turned on him and rent him. The situation was brutal and could be met only in one way — with the one quality which the mob respects — animal courage.

Courage? Fra Domenico had it; and it was the test of faith. Faith? He had it — but was it a burning faith? For years he had invoked martyrdom, but now that it had come, something stubborn rose within him, taking him by the throat, equivocating desperately with his

fate, and whispering that the time had not come. Was he not reserved for another, a higher end? Was not the whole responsibility of the reform of the Church in his hands? And was he to be put off by a contemptible trick? No one could question his courage; he had proved it to the world and to himself, again and again, and he would not fail when the climax came. But what man can tell when the climax of life is come? Life is so evasive, so unexpected, so resourceful, so utterly without finality — it tempts one to reserve one's heroism — sometimes too long, and the climax overtakes one unawares, ignominiously. Was this the climax? or did it lie, on another crest, beyond? Who can say to the day: you have no morrow? In such struggles, the abysmal sophistries of the heart are best sealed in silence. He did not prevent Fra Domenico from accepting the challenge; neither did he take his place. Instead, he published a defense in which he declared that 'he had too great an undertaking in hand to lose himself in such miserable disputes.' If his adversaries, he said, would bind themselves to settle the decision of his cause and the reform of the Church by the experiment, he would not hesitate to enter the fire, and he was convinced that he would issue from it, unscathed. " But if they expect the fire to prove the validity of the excommunication, let them reply to our reasons. Or is it a means of combating our prophecies? But we neither force nor urge anyone to believe us beyond his own inclination.

We exhort men to live honestly, and for that the fire of piety, the miracle of faith, is needed; all the rest matters nothing. Our adversaries, who have instigated the experiment, say that they are certain of dying; they confess themselves suicides. We, on the other hand, are challenged and forced to accept, because the honor of God and the Faith is involved. Those who truly feel themselves inspired by the Lord will undoubtedly issue unscathed from the flames, if the experiment takes place, of which we yet doubt. As for myself, I reserve myself for a greater task in behalf of which I shall always be ready to lay down my life. A time will come when the Lord will disclose supernatural signs; for the present, it is sufficient to point out that, by sending some of our friars, we expose ourselves as well to the fury of the people, in case the Lord should not bring them unscathed through the flame."

The calm oil of reason flowed on, an ineffectual balm. The peril and glory passed to Fra Domenico; and it was agreed that he should meet another Franciscan, Fra Giuliano Rondinelli, who volunteered to substitute for da Puglia, on the secret understanding that the experiment would never take place. The secret very soon transpired, however, for it was openly discussed at the supper tables of the Compagnacci, a gang of aristocratic young bullies, who were backing the Franciscans. It reached San Marco, and Savonarola saw that his one hope of escape was to outface his foes. He did so and

insisted that the pyre should be made a death-trap from which no escape was possible. The ordeal now turned to a sinister farce, in which each party sought to intimidate the other; the ludicrous and the sublime were grimly partnered. The Franciscans, despite the assurances of their backers, began to waver, while the Dominicans daily grew bolder. The example of Fra Domenico, with his uncompromising and uncalculating courage, inspired the whole community; three hundred monks volunteered; the laity, men and women alike, stood up in church, offering themselves unflinchingly. Hysteria and histrionism, bravado and faith, were impenetrably confused, and Savonarola himself was carried away by the enthusiasm of his followers.

Nothing else was talked of in Florence, and the question came up in the deliberations of the Government. The Signoria had authorized the experiment, but in view of the growing excitement the Councils debated its wisdom. Some protested against its barbarity; the majority, however, were disposed to make light of it. One speaker suggested that a more humane and, for a friar, effective martyrdom would be a tub of cold water; the water might even be lukewarm. Fire, he said, seemed to him ' a very strange thing ' and he meddled with it unwillingly. " We might try, with less peril, putting them in water, and if Fra Girolamo do not yield, I will be one of the first to ask his pardon." This levity was an index of the general feeling. The ordeal

was dismissed as 'a preachers' spat, and rather to be treated in Rome, where they canonize saints, than in the Palace, where it is more proper to discuss money or war.' The real issue was this: "If at all costs the experiment must be made, we should consider whether it will eradicate discord or not." The factiousness which the Friar, willingly or unwillingly, created in Florence had exasperated all parties. The Frateschi were in a helpless minority; some of them favored the ordeal with blind faith in its outcome, others advocated it for precisely the opposite reason — to rid themselves of a political encumbrance, now that the tide was turning against him. The really grave symptom, however, was the hostility of moderate opinion. He had foreseen that the tepid would be his undoing; all his life he had dreaded the lukewarm with the instinctive apprehension of a nature to which enthusiasm was vital; and now, when he most needed the support of moderation and sanity, those elements forsook him. This revulsion of feeling was due in part to the mistakes of his party, in part to the fallacy on which his career had been founded — the confusion of political and religious issues. His political influence was exhausted; his moral influence was an embarrassment; and when the opportunity to dissociate them arose, the reaction set in sharply. Florence had long chafed under the reputation of being Friar-ridden; its degeneracy was roundly denounced by a speaker who protested against the prostitution of State

matters to the emasculating influences of monastic squabbles. "When I hear of such things," he exclaimed, "I do not know whether to wish to live or die. If our forefathers, the founders of the City, had ever dreamed that we should debate such things and make ourselves the laughing stock of the world, I believe they would never have deigned to begin anything." The innate contempt of the average Italian for the clerical class awoke, and the Arrabbiati were able to persuade the neutrals not only to wash their hands of the Friar, but to penalize him as the person primarily responsible for the division of the city. In authorizing the experiment, the Government took the occasion to censure it as well; it provided that, if either of the champions perished, his superior should be banished; if both, the penalty was to apply to Savonarola alone. In other words, a premium was placed on the bluff of the Franciscans, who had instigated the ordeal, while its odium was imputed to the Dominicans, because of their faith.

With all the odds against him, Savonarola adopted the only possible course, that of unfaltering boldness. He took the initiative, insisting that the experiment should be conclusive and the preparations for it formidable. At the last moment a hope arose, however, that it might be legitimately averted. The Government postponed it for a day, in the expectation of intervention from Rome; but though the Pope expressed his disap-

proval of it, it suited his purpose too well, and he made no move to prevent it.

The appointed day dawned (April 7, 1498). The Government had taken extraordinary precautions against a disturbance. The gates were closed, the palace bristled with arms and men, soldiers guarded the Piazza, the crowd pouring into it was searched for weapons, and women were excluded. The spectacle was set for one in the afternoon; long before then the life of the city had concentrated, like a hemorrhage, about its heart; and stray cats had the outlying streets all to themselves. The great square was packed; the windows and roofs were black with people; and the children lodged on the shoulders of statues for vantage. Over that dense mass the only moving things were the swallows, wheeling in fickle and inquisitive flight about the pyre. It was a patient, voluble, cheerful, Italian crowd which waited for its lethal holiday, squatting, standing, laughing, drinking, eating, and too cramped even to relieve its natural needs. Only a small portion of it could see the pyre; for the information of the rest the Arrabbiati had stationed agents among the mob. The first to arrive were the Franciscans, who straggled in nonchalantly, pausing to chat with the crowd, while their champion entered the Palace. Presently a sound of chanting announced the approach of the Dominicans, who emerged in solemn procession, three hundred monks, ambling and singing, escorted by a crowd with

lighted tapers. Preceded by a cross-bearer, and headed by Savonarola bearing the Host and Fra Domenico in a flaming red chasuble, the cortege wound its way to the Loggia dei Lanzi, where an altar had been prepared. The long wait, the anticipation of hours and of years, was over; and a great silence settled over the crowd.

What followed was vague in the minds of the onlookers. The little spot of scarlet, which was Fra Domenico, was seen rising from his prayers at the altar; but there was no sign of his adversary; instead, there was a constant come-and-go between the Palace and the Loggia, an interminable series of preliminaries, parleys, delays. Magic — the word circulated — the Franciscans were objecting to Fra Domenico's vestments; they might be, they were, enchanted. The blood-red figure was seen striding towards the Palace with a Dominican monk; and presently he reappeared in a plain smock. Once more expectation rose, once more it was baffled. There were more parleys, a further come-and-go, new objections. The crowd began to murmur. What was happening? It was plain: the friars were hedging; but only those within earshot knew from which side the objections came; the great mass, craning, shuffling, seeing nothing, were readily misled by the agents of the Arrabbiati, who jeered the Dominicans. This was the moment for which the Compagnacci had been waiting. Their leader, mounted on a chafing animal, pressed forward,

shouting, and the stampeded mob surged toward the Loggia. The courage of a lone partisan of Savonarola held it at bay, however, and the Government mercenaries, rallying about him, pressed the crowd back. Order was restored, and once more the wait began. The rabble by now was in an ugly mood. Suddenly the April sky darkened, and a downpour drenched the multitude; but it held its ground grimly, and the shower passed as quickly as it arose. A stifling humidity rose from the steaming pavement; the eaves dripped, in long slow luminous drops; and overhead a moonlike sun swam through the fleeing vapors. Again the wrangling began. Fra Domenico yielded to every demand; he had exchanged his robe, now he surrendered his cross; but Savonarola insisted that he should carry the Host through the fire. On this question a lengthy dispute ensued, involving the question of whether or not the immaterial substance of the Sacrament could burn with the vessel which contained it; and the Franciscans made the most of it. Savonarola appealed to canonical authority; the Franciscans countered with scandalized volubility; and while they plunged deeper and deeper into a ramifying mass of theological dilemmas, the restless multitude, milling among puddles and dungheaps, mimicked their chaffer with vicious impatience. Evening was approaching, and the debate was still in progress, when the Government countermanded the ordeal.

Of all conclusions this was the most impotent and dangerous. The Franciscans dispersed rapidly, and the fury of the crowd fell on their opponents. Amid the jeering and jostling of the mob, Savonarola and his monks, protected by a handful of his followers, regained San Marco. There a little congregation of women had remained to pray, and to them he made an accounting of all that had passed. But it was not to the mothers of men that his accounting was due; it was to men; and they were soon heard from.

# XI

# *Trial and Death*

## I

VIOLENCE was in the air, and twenty-four hours later it broke. It was Palm Sunday, and in the afternoon a Dominican friar was to preach in the Duomo. At the door he was turned back by the Compagnacci, who entered the church, dispersed the congregation, and started on the run for San Marco. Soon the calm Sabbath streets echoed with a familiar sound: the dull double-time of racing feet reverberating between narrow walls. At that sound, every door closed; the chase swept by; and cautious faces appeared at the windows. In San Marco, Vespers were over, and there was just time to close the doors and dismiss the congregation, before the stones began to fly. Fra Silvestro, unknown to his superior, had laid in a small stock of arms, and thirty laymen, together with half as many monks, hastily buckled themselves into breastplates and distributed billhooks and old arquebuses. Fra Domenico protested; the Prior protested; but they were swept

aside. Then Savonarola knew that his hour had come, and he rose to it. All hesitation vanished. Seizing a cross, "This tempest is for me," he cried, and made for the door. Life had suddenly become easy, simple, exhilarating, a mere nothing, valuable only when despised, rich to the reckless, barren to those who clung to it. When his monks flung themselves on him, protesting, he urged them to lay down their arms and follow him. They hesitated: the heroic impulse passed. They determined to await the slaughter in their own walls; and forming in procession, they circled the cloisters for the last time, singing their spirit into the old haunts. Then they passed into the choir, where Savonarola reminded them, with the Host in hand, that their only weapon was prayer; and they knelt at his feet, adoring the Sacrament and singing: *Salvum fac populum tuum, Domine!*

They were thus engaged, when a summons from the Government was shouted in, giving the Friar twelve hours to leave Florentine territory, and requiring his defenders to disperse. A few took advantage of this opportunity to escape, among them Valori, who slipped out and hurried to his house for help. There he was arrested, and on the way to the Palace kinsmen of the Medici conspirators bludgeoned him to death. Meanwhile, at San Marco, fighting had begun. Fire was set to the doors, and the besiegers, scaling the garden walls, ran through the cloisters and burst into the church.

*Execution of Savonarola*

The Friars, startled out of grace, seized torches and fought like infuriated bats, and with such effect that they put their assailants to flight. The monastery had not emasculated their manhood, their blood was up; some pursued the invaders, others tolled the great bell, and several clambered onto the roof and flung tiles on the crowd. The church was now filled with a dense acrid smoke, which swelled into a moving canopy of glowing clouds, swallowing the columns and inflating the vault; and in that sulphurous murk the ghostly flock moved, as in some dim unearthly pandemonium, each in his ultimate role, some fighting, some praying, one groping on all fours for a coin, another sighing out life in a psalm. The windows were smashed, and light travelled over the scene. In the pulpit, amid billowing fumes, a young German monk squared his legs, braced his crossbow, and lectured the world with lead; and with each plug he sang like an archangel: *Salvum fac populum tuum, Domine!*

This unexpected resistance gave the besiegers pause, and the attack abated. The defenders were weary but elated; but their triumph turned to discouragement at a second summons from the Signoria. Nevertheless, when the attack was resumed, they resisted. The doors were flaming, and they fell back into the choir, where the German took cover behind the High Altar and, resting his arquebus on the Crucifix, aimed at the widening arc of fire. In vain Savonarola protested against the

unhallowed fray: the church and its tombs continued to echo with the dull thud of bullets.

A third summons, however, put an end to the struggle. Savonarola prepared to submit to arrest; but Fra Domenico, suspecting a ruse on the part of the mob, took the precaution of sending the commissioners back for a writ, and while they were waiting for their return, the Prior, summoning his flock into the Greek Library, took leave of them. " I expected this," he said, " but not so quickly and suddenly." He confirmed the truth of his inspiration. " All that I have told you I had from God, and He is my witness in Heaven that I do not lie. My last word to you is this: let faith, patience, and prayer be your arms. I leave you with anguish and grief to go into the hands of our enemies. I do not know if they will take my life, but of this I am certain, I can serve you better in death than in life. Take courage, embrace the Cross, and you will find the portal of salvation." He then confessed himself to Fra Domenico and took communion. Then the temptation of life once more raised its head and the horror of martyrdom. As they were waiting, his friends urged him to attempt escape. He hesitated. But a voice spoke; it was still and small — and it was not his own. Fra Malatesta Sacramoro, to whom the fame of an Iscariot clings, was also a disappointed fanatic. A true believer, he offered himself for the Ordeal by fire, but its failure shook his faith; he could not forgive his master's defeat; and at the first hint of evasion,

he intervened. " Should not the Shepherd lay down his life for the flock? " he asked. Clinging as a kiss, that voice spoke, and it arrested him. The Prior said nothing, but he embraced him; then, one by one, his whole flock. Slowly he passed, down the whole length of the Library, leaving on every lip his life. Fra Malatesta was satisfied: the honor of the martyr was safe.

It was three in the morning; the siege had lasted seven hours; and the crowd had waited long for its sport. It had it now. As he appeared in the cloisters, there was a rush and he was swept into the street. Suddenly, he passed from one plane of life to another: suddenly, from the exaltation of the Library, he plunged into the violence of the gutter. Reality engulfed him; and all the fond illusions of the bookmen, all the flattering fictions of the spirit — honor, courage, heroism — unmeaning words, decent myths with which men mask their naked impotence — vanished under the blind buffeting, the lawless reality, the final pain of the flesh. The mob closed over him; he rolled in its labor like an infant in the womb, he was born at last to reality. The many-handed, mothering mob swaddled him in blows, wrenched his arms, twisted his fingers, and thrust an excruciating flame into his eyes with the cry: " Here is the True Light! " Gradually, the convulsive mass disgorged him, his guards delivered him; he was marched off to the Palace, with the rabble at his heels. Refuge loomed ahead; lynching gave way to the law; and he was

relinquished with a kick — " and there," laughed the booster, " is where the Spirit of Prophecy lies! " A few minutes later, the magistrates were examining him on his Divine Inspiration.

## II

His Divine Inspiration! In the trial that followed his examiners attacked it with a ferocity which left little to choose between the methods of lynching and those of the law. Every method — intimidation, torture, and deliberate falsification of the evidence — was employed to incriminate him of a statutory offense. All failed; and then, with vindictive impotence, the prosecution fastened on his prophetic claims as the one weak point in his integrity. It was the one point on which he himself was uncertain and, under repeated torture, he broke down and denied it. It was a thin shred on which to hang him, but it had to do. He was convicted of humanity, condemned as an impostor, and hanged on his character: an indictment by no means unique in the annals of criminal jurisprudence.

Nevertheless, in this vicious mock-trial, a crude justice was at work. Its peculiar vindictiveness was due not merely to mob fury, partisan passion, and ecclesiastical politics; beyond these lurked another motive, more remote, more imponderable, which was never formulated but which finally determined the issue. The mor-

alist was on trial. For years the resentment of his pretensions had been gathering to a head, and it now broke in accumulated fury. Under every charge lurked an animal antipathy, a grim determination to probe his superiority, to pluck out its mystery, to unmask his motives and reduce them to normal humanity. This furious reaction was inspired not only by vulgar prejudice but by a profound temperamental antagonism, symptomatic of the times. The Renaissance, like our own day, was one of those recurring periods, when established moral values break down and men revert to the direct intuition of life, the spontaneity of instinct, and the unfettered pursuit of experience; when, in short, they recover their natural religion and resume their correct relation to the universe, by functioning in simple obedience to their being. Savonarola, embodying the dogmatic and obsolete code of mediaeval Christianity, represented an obstacle doomed to extinction. Under ordinary circumstances, the process might have been merciful and slow; but the peculiar conditions which allowed him to legislate his ideals in a theocratic experiment precipitated and embittered the reaction. In his martyrdom, one generation was trying another. This was the sole grandeur and the only justification of the vindictiveness with which his trial was conducted. Disinterested passions, of course, inspire the most fanatical cruelties; and he was so barbarously baited because the true motives of the prosecution were inadmissible. His

principles were still conventionally accepted and could not be directly impugned; it was only on his person and his character that his persecutors could wreak their exasperation.

The extent of the feeling against him was manifest immediately after his arrest. Popular fury exerted a continual pressure on the Government, chafing at its delays. Yet the Government needed no urging; dominated by the Arrabbiati, it set to work immediately to impanel an extraordinary commission of sixteen examiners, heavily loaded with his enemies. Simultaneously the Ten, who were favorable to him and in whose jurisdiction the trial should normally have fallen, were dismissed from office before the legal term. So great was the impatience that there was no time even to secure the authorization of Rome for the trial of an ecclesiastic; but this was subsequently obtained without difficulty. With voluptuous relief Alexander wrote to congratulate the Government on the capture of ' that son of iniquity, Fra Hieronymo Savonarola, who not only deluded the people with vain and pretentious promises but resisted your commands and ours by force of arms.' He authorized his examination, ' even with torture,' requiring merely that two clerics sit in on it and that he be handed over, at its conclusion, to his own representatives. Ludovico Sforza also was not behindhand with his felicitations. At the same time, his one hope of foreign help — faint as it was — vanished with the death of Charles

VIII. On the day of the ordeal, he bumped his head in a doorway and departed the world.

The necessity of giving a judicial color to his murder protracted his ordeal for forty days and nights. His innocence defeated every attempt to traduce it; it transpired in spite of his examiners, in spite of himself. A notary then volunteered to manipulate the evidence. " Where none exists," he said, with a deprecating shrug, " it must be manufactured." After ten days a confession was finally extracted by browbeating, torture, and forgery, and published; but it was so unconvincing that it was hastily withdrawn and the notary was docked of his pay. On political grounds no legal impeachment was established. The real grievance lay deeper. As a visionary agitator, he was a demoralizing influence in practical life; his ominous prophecies, his moral campaign, his emotional spellbinding, created alarm, fomented discord, and bred a restless and unwholesome agitation in the commonwealth; and it was this complaint which found vent in the charge that he was a " seducer of the people." But for such charges the laws offered no formula. To destroy his influence, it was necessary therefore to unmask him as an impostor, and the attack shifted to his prophetic claims. At first he resisted, even under torture. " This is not a State matter," he said. " Whether I am a true prophet or no, God will show. No man is entitled to judge another by his intention, but by his conduct. If my inspiration comes

from God, it will be proven; if it comes from man, it will crumble." Gradually, however, the tortures produced in him a ghastly ventriloquism of doubt. Frail, worn by years of asceticism and strain, he was confused by physical agony; and he succumbed to the no less deadly common sense of his questioners. With each wrench of the rope, his convictions snapped; and worse than the dread of their might, the fear that they might be right wrung from him the uttermost pang. His mind reviewed the past, he could not be sure; he remembered, he admitted, how he had begun to preach "by the light of natural reason," how gradually he had hypnotized himself with Apocalyptic visions, how his revelations had been challenged and later supported by Fra Silvestro, how he had sometimes appropriated the somnambulist's fancies. . . . Once the disintegration set in, there was no staying it; and when he was released, all within him was ruin. But his examiners were still unsatisfied. The imposture established, they probed for the motive. Why had he done this? He resisted his tormentors with mental reservations: "For glory," he admitted, forbearing to add, "the glory of God." But there was no ambiguity in the minds of his judges, and they determined that there should be none in the minds of the public. The eager pen of the forger interpolated, again and again, "for the glory of the world," "for esteem and reputation," "all that I have done I planned to do to have credit in Florence and to be

famous forever in the present and in the future." Then, at last, his examiners rested. Their point had been gained; he had disowned his disinterestedness, admitted ambition, and been reduced to common clay. With that all the rest followed of itself: his prestige, his ideas, his following, crumbled. The sting of his sanctity was drawn, and they could proceed, with impunity, to martyrize a humbug.

The gain, in truth, was pitifully small, but it sufficed. He signed the confession, though he protested against the interpolations; it was witnessed by five friars of San Marco, and read in the Grand Council. The effect on the simple-minded was disastrous. " My heart was pained," one of them wrote, " to see such an edifice crumble, because it was founded on a lie. . . . He whom we held to be a prophet confessed that he was none and had not received from God the things he preached, and he admitted that many things which happened during the course of his preaching were contrary to what he gave us to understand." His monks repudiated him, implored the authorities, if they released him, not to send him to San Marco, and wrote to the Pope, begging to be taken back into the fold. No one paused to consider that his work and his principles remained intact; the suddenness and completeness of the general disillusionment revealed the ephemeral, the purely emotional, nature of his influence.

A second trial, undertaken to strengthen the first,

was abandoned without result, after three days. Then ensued an interval of almost a month, while he awaited the arrival of Alexander's commissioners sent from Rome. The daily baiting ceased and now the torment of the mind set in — the humiliation of his infirmity, the collapse of his credit, the disfigurement of his character. Physically, he was shattered; he had to be fed like a child; and spiritually he was exhausted. He attempted to rehabilitate himself in his own eyes. But the power of prophecy, once forsworn, forsook him; he prayed for it in vain; he had abused of his imagination too long, he fell back impotent. Then came an immense disheartenment, an inrush of flooding doubts and fears. Would it be with him as with the world? would everything crumble, once the prop of his inspiration had been broken? would his convictions themselves fail, because of that fatal rhetorical exaggeration? The whole fabric of his inner life trembled. He struggled for faith — for faith in himself and then, not finding it, for faith in God — faith which is a gift of grace, faith for which no effort of will or reason avails. He was submerged in moral delirium, and he poured its effusions into a long commentary on the XXXth Psalm: *In te, Domine, speravi!* Feverishly, incessantly, the Demon of Melancholy tore at his faith. " Everything happens by chance and nothing exists but what we see with our eyes. Our spirit will vanish in smoke. Who is he that after death has returned from Hell to confirm one thing of all that

are told us will befall the soul after death? Fables, fables, old wives' tales! . . . Follow my counsel," murmurs the Tempter. "Heaven denies you, Earth will have none of you; it is better to die. Elect death, and if no man will give it, take it with your own hands." Then, flinging off the Tempter, he lashed himself. "How long will you be an infant? How long will it take you to learn how to fight? You have been so often in battle and are half in the shadow of death, and you have not learned yet how to fight! Take courage, coward!" But again the thought of death overtakes him, this time in its hideous reality, mocking its solace with the verminous life of the grave. "Moths shall make your bed, and of worms will your coverlet be!" On the brink of extinction, he peers anxiously for his reflection in the void. If the after airs know his identity, how will they know it? As a wraith elated by the cherubim? or a ghost outcast into darkness? God is a jealous God; and those that die without faith, the heathen, the Hebrew, the Infidel, even the unbaptized babe, He damns without mercy. Once more the foundering struggle for faith begins, once more the endless round of hope and despair; and then it breaks off abruptly — on a recurrence of confidence — interrupted at last by his actual preparations for death.

On May 19, the Papal Commissioners arrived. They were a shrewdly assorted pair. Gioacchino Turriano, the Dominican General, who had constantly befriended him,

was there to lend countenance to the proceedings with his mild virtue; but he was the silent partner of an unscrupulous Spaniard, Francesco Romolino, who carried Alexander's commission over his heart. As they rode into Florence, a crowd accosted them with cries of "Death to the Friar!" Romolino nodded, pointing to his breast: "He will die." He made no secret of his instructions. "We shall have a brave fire," he said to his host, "I have the sentence here in my pocket."

One final degradation remained. After re-examining him on the charges of the civil trial, Romolino pressed him to discover if he had been encouraged to write for the Council by influential friends — the Cardinal of Naples, for instance. At the prospect of incriminating an innocent man and his benefactor, he knew the last agony and resisted desperately; but in vain. "Napoli, Napoli!" he cried, when he could stand the wrack no longer. "With him and with other Cardinals I have practised." The next day, with tears in his eyes, he retracted the accusation. But he was exhausted: the triumph of the flesh was complete, the spirit was an ephemeral fiction: he had plumbed its nothingness.

The trial lasted three days; and then, since nothing had been discovered, Romolino wrote to the Pope that the crimes of the Friar "were so enormous, that it does not seem proper to reveal them at present," and passed sentence. With him Fra Domenico and Fra

Silvestro were condemned. The latter, under torture, had repudiated his master. Fra Domenico, on the other hand, had been unflinching; neither the wrack nor the forged confession shook his faith; and finding no fraud and so much courage in him, Romolino was tempted to spare him. But he was reminded that those very qualities would perpetuate the influence of the Friar; and he shrugged. " A mischievous friar more or less matters little," he remarked, and signed the warrant.

The sentence was hanging. Savonarola received it in silence, Fra Silvestro with protestations of innocence, and Fra Domenico with challenging eagerness, begging that it might be converted, for greater glory, to burning. On the eve of the execution, the three met for the first time during the trial. Standing between them, with all that he longed to be on the one hand and all that he feared to be on the other, Savonarola tasted, in that tacit comparison, one last mortification: the faithful and the unfaithful disciple reminded him, by their presence, of the infirmity of his humanity. Turning to Fra Domenico, he said: " I hear that you have asked to die by fire. It is not for us to choose the death we desire. Do we know our own strength? do we know how we will endure the death to which we are condemned? It depends not on us, but on the grace which the Lord may grant us." Then he turned to Fra Silvestro. " I hear that you wish to defend your innocence before the people. I require you to abandon such a thought and

follow the example of Jesus Christ, who not even on the Cross would defend His innocence." The disciples made no reply; he gave them his blessing; and they parted.

## III

He met his end with a composure which baffled the expectations of the crowd. The preparations were imposing. In the center of the Piazza a gibbet had been raised, heaped with fuel at the base, and connected with the Palace by a long runway, under which the children posted themselves to harry him with sticks as he passed. Not once, as the long preliminary ritual wound itself out, did he quail; and he spoke only two or three times. In the office of ecclesiastical degradation, the prelate stumbled over his text and concluded with the words, "I separate you from the Church militant and triumphant"; whereupon he corrected him — "From the Church militant, not triumphant: that is not in your power." Then the death-march began. Fra Domenico could not keep silence and burst into a *Te Deum;* when he was urged to refrain, he begged his escort to sing with him under their breath. But his master remained impassive. As he advanced, a bystander comforted him. "Only God," he said, "can comfort a man in his last hour." "How do you suffer this martyrdom?" Another asked him. No prying eye

was to know; he was beyond the pale; and the reply was remote and impersonal. "Christ has suffered so much for me."

He was the last to die. As the noose was slipped about his neck, a voice cried, "Now is the time, Prophet, for a miracle!" He heard those words — and heard no more. He was swung; and suddenly, in mid-air, his composure broke into a convulsive abdominal dance. Within the laboring carcass the last sensations — the breakneck strain, the reptile swell of the tongue, the frenzied drumming of the heart — subsided; and the long captivity of life was over.

The great voice that had cried out so long against life was stilled, and time rolled over his traces, obliterating them. For years his memory was revered and reviled. His writings were banned and his name forbidden, but the faithful read him in secret and remembered him in their prayers. The Piagnoni were persecuted; they cherished him in underground cults. A race of prophets sprang up, who revived his message and suffered, unremembered, his fate; and at fair-time cardboard giants stalked the streets, flouted in his name. Then the mockery and the martyrdom waned; his wake grew dim; and Time did the work of his enemies. Succeeding generations of men submerged his last traces; and the passion that had been Jerome Savonarola came to rest, at last, on the calm shelves of the library.

The children remembered him in their own way. A month after his death, in the meadows by the Arno, a strange breed of caterpillars appeared. The boys curled them on their fingers and exhibited them as ' Fra Girolamo's caterpillars.' This childish fancy perplexed their elders, and they examined the little creatures carefully: — What did they mean? But who can probe the fancies of children? The worm, it was agreed, was miraculous; but what it portended no one could say. The body was wondrously marked; the head, furrowed with a cross and haloed with a filmy diadem, resembled a human face; and with this beauty, it was strangely destructive, devouring the sloe-bushes for miles around. Some looked on its beauty, some on its ravages, and none could reconcile them, until it was found that it was barren. Moving in a perpetual travail, the little creature produced no winged thing. In beauty like an angel, in effect like a pest, it disappeared at last, leaving a blight behind it. Meanwhile, the common caterpillars flourished; and in due time the air was filled with bright, dancing butterflies.

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